

February 10, 2021

The Honorable Rachel Prusak
900 Court Street NE, H-489
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chairwoman Prusak and Health Committee Members,

On behalf of Catholics for Choice, I want to express our unequivocal support for HB 2362. This critical legislation establishes much-needed oversight to safeguard the health and rights of Oregon residents and protect their right to make conscience-based decisions. For nearly 50 years, Catholics for Choice has served as a voice for the majority of Catholics—including almost 500,000 in Oregon—who support access to comprehensive reproductive care, including abortion. In full accordance with the teachings of our Catholic faith, we shape and advance sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to each person's well-being, and support the individual's ability to make personal choices that are right for them, including whether to become or remain pregnant, according to their own beliefs and consciences. Oregonians deserve access to the health care they need and the freedom to carry out their conscience-based decisions.

Catholic health care, while admirable in expressed purpose, can be far less admirable in practice. It often hides disturbing exclusions and mistreatments. Catholic hospitals were originally established to serve immigrant Catholics and carry out the social justice imperatives of our Catholic tradition to treat and serve the poor and vulnerable. Unfortunately, they have grown into massive, billion-dollar conglomerates that are antithetical to their mission, with increasing ubiquity that often cheats individuals of access to critical reproductive health care and discriminates against the very marginalized communities whom their mission intended to serve.

Catholic hospitals account for about one-sixth of hospital beds across the nation, with that proportion increasing annually. Many communities, especially those with the most racial diversity, are increasingly limited in their choices and access to crucial reproductive health care. Catholic hospitals are obligated to follow the Ethical and Religious Directives (ERDs), a set of guidelines established by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that are based on a misleading interpretation of Catholic doctrine, not on best medical practice. The Directives prohibit abortion, contraception, sterilization, and in vitro fertilization, limit access to emergency contraception, and establish grounds for denying transgender individuals the care they need.

(more)

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Jamie Manson

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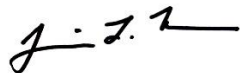
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These are not the principles that everyday Catholics abide by. As Catholics, we hold individual conscience as sacred. It is not the place of a hospital--nor its staff--to coerce the consciences of medical professionals who want to care for their patients, nor is it the place of hospitals to deny patients any care they seek. It is even more unseemly when such institutions, which rely on funds from taxpayers for a portion of their revenue, profess to operate in the interest of the common good, yet discriminate both in the services they provide and to whom they deliver those services. Catholics aspire to treat every individual with respect and dignity, and we are deeply committed to making sure that each individual can access the full range of reproductive health care they need, whether that is an abortion, in vitro fertilization, contraception or trans-inclusive health care. Catholics believe that hospitals should provide a full range of services and strive to meet the full scope of a community's needs.

Oregonians who are impoverished, racial minorities, live in rural areas, or who are young already face enormous challenges accessing healthcare. In this unprecedented time of stress, scarcity and sickness, legislation like HB 2362 establishes a process to observe, assess and value the health of Oregon's providers and communities. It centers the needs of the vulnerable during health care merger processes, gives low-income workers a voice to make sure their health care concerns are being addressed properly, and makes it easier for the most marginalized to obtain quality reproductive health care. It is a desperately needed balm for the body and spirit. This is legislation that aligns with our Catholic values.

Indeed, Catholics for Choice urges you to swiftly pass this important legislation and protect the conscience and well-being of Oregonians. Thank you for your consideration.

Jamie L. Manson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. L. Manson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

President
Catholics for Choice