

January 17, 2020

Bill Number: HCR5019

Opposition Testimony: Written Only

Dear Chairman Barker and members of the House Federal and State Affairs Committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to HCR5019.

As a scholar with an academic background in the study of both religion and gender, and who has devoted considerable study to the topic of abortion, I wish to strongly voice my opposition to HCR5019. There are a number of solid political arguments that could be made against it, such as the fact that it is an obvious example of government overreach into the personal lives of citizens, for what is more violating than a member of the government telling you whether and how you should make personal medical decisions? The other clear argument is that it will not prevent abortion but will only cause women to travel for an abortion, thus further disenfranchising poor women for whom travel and additional missed days off work are potentially catastrophic. As the data amply shows, restricting abortion in certain states or regions while providing it in others does nothing to eradicate abortion, but simply changes the logistics of how and when one receives one.

I wish to speak, however, to a perhaps less obvious element of this, and that is the First Amendment implications of HCR5019. Many American conservative Christians presume that if one is religious then one is automatically against abortion, but nothing could be further from the truth. A variety of religious groups do not accept this perspective. A very, very few oppose abortion in all instances, while several oppose it in some instances (but these instances vary). However, a wide variety of others believe it to be a personal decision for the pregnant woman alone. To effectively create a law regarding abortion that limits it according to the popular religious views of a single group is a violation of the religious rights of the whole. If we are to maintain a separation of church and state and thus preserve the freedom of one's conscience, it is absolutely imperative that we not make decisions for other people about how they interpret the nature of the fetus, just as we do not make decisions for them on how they will interpret their own religious beliefs.

As a mountain of other clear evidence has shown, the best way to reduce abortion numbers is to provide **clear and complete** sexual and reproductive education along with easy and free or low-cost access to contraception. People who are serious about reducing abortion should be strategizing from this particular starting point. The rationale behind HCR5019 to reduce abortion is simply counterfactual.

For all of these reasons, I ask that you oppose HCR5019.

Thank you for your consideration,

Leslie Dorrrough Smith, Ph.D.