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**IN GOOD CONSCIENCE**

January 30, 2019

Vermont House Committee on Human Services  
Vermont State House  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Dear Chair Pugh, Vice Chair Haas, Ranking Member McFaun and members of the Committee:

On behalf of Catholics for Choice I wish to express my strongest support for H. 57 and urge the backing of the Human Services committee. This vital legislation would recognize abortion as a fundamental right and enshrine in statute the right of reproductive health choices for women in Vermont—protecting women’s moral autonomy to ensure that each woman can continue to follow her conscience regarding her pregnancy.

For more than forty years, Catholics for Choice has served as a voice for the majority of Catholics—including 117,000 Catholics in Vermont—who support access to comprehensive reproductive care, including abortion. Catholics for Choice strives to be an expression of the lived experiences of everyday faithful Catholics as they follow their conscience in moral matters. We lift up the voices of the majority of faithful prochoice Catholics who want to protect a woman’s agency regarding decisions about pregnancy and advocate for policies that allow all individuals to make their own moral decisions about their health and their lives.

Catholic teaching reveres individual conscience as the final arbiter in moral decision making. We are called by our faith to follow our consciences when we make moral decisions about our lives and deeply respect the right of others to do the same. Catholics support each woman’s ability to make personal choices that are right for herself and her family, including whether to become or remain pregnant, according to her own beliefs and based on her own conscience. H. 57 honors these teachings by protecting the right to choose in the state of Vermont.

This bill affirms that each woman is a moral agent, deserving of dignity and respect and that it is neither our role—nor that of the government—to judge or interfere with a woman making this decision for herself and her family. This is a belief that we as Catholics hold dear.

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It is critical that every woman has the information and resources to make her best decision, in consultation with her doctor and loved ones. It is critical that the legislature trust women to make their own personal decisions and support its constituents. With H. 57, Vermont can continue to blaze trails in the fight for dignity and equality.

Our Catholic social tradition also compels us to advocate for the poor and marginalized. We know that policies that restrict access to reproductive healthcare disproportionately harm those who struggle the most to make ends meet in both urban and rural areas. Out of respect for the dignity of all people, including the poorest and most marginalized, and in celebration of the independence, which is characteristic of Vermont, Catholics support access to the full range of reproductive healthcare services, including abortion.

As Americans and Catholics, we are charged to honor religious freedom. Catholics celebrate the value of a pluralistic, secular democracy where every person is assured both freedom of and freedom from religion. The proper role of government in the United States is not to privilege one set of religious views over others, but to protect each person's right and ability to make decisions according to one's own beliefs. This bill truly reflects the religious freedom protections that are guaranteed to every individual by the Constitution.

As Catholics, we trust women and believe they and their families deserve dignity and respect for their personal and private healthcare decisions. I ask you to stand with the majority of your constituents, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, who support access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including abortion.

I ask you to support H.57 because it would affirm that all individuals are worthy of being able to decide what is best for themselves and their families. It is the right thing to do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Glenn Northern".

Glenn Northern

Domestic Program Director