

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a written testimony to the Senate Medical Affairs Committee. My name is Charlie Forstein and I am currently a student at the College of Charleston and a member of the Reform Jewish Community, the largest Jewish denomination in North America. I am deeply connected to my faith community, having served as President and Religious and Cultural Vice President of the Southern Area Region of NFTY: the Reform Jewish Youth Movement as a high school student. Currently I am an involved member of Hillel on my college campus.

As a current resident of South Carolina, a Reform Jew, and a young adult of reproductive age, I am asking the Senate Medical Affairs Committee to **vote in opposition to H.3020**, which would ban abortions as early as six weeks.

I am opposed to this bill on a multitude of reasons. This bill will restrict South Carolina women the right to safe healthcare and the freedom to do what is best for themselves in their pregnancy.

Currently, South Carolina ranks 49th in healthcare for pregnant mothers and newborns. The maternal mortality rates in South Carolina are the 9th highest in the nation¹, and by restricting the ability for women to access safe abortion care, this number is bound to rise.

While some religious views may support the language in this bill, these views do not represent the views of everyone in the faith community. To illustrate this point, I would like to share some ideas from the Torah (the Jewish community's book of holy teachings) which inspire my advocacy in urging you to oppose H. 3020. In Exodus 21:22-24, the Torah distinguishes between the value of a fetus and the life of a mother. We are told that if someone causes a pregnant woman to miscarry by pushing her, the person is responsible for paying a fine, while if the push causes the woman herself to die, "*the penalty shall be life for life*". This quote from Exodus shares the different punishments for taking the life of a fetus versus the life of a mother, giving a larger consequence to causing the death of the mother, with the implication that the life of the mother has greater value. By banning access to safe abortions after six weeks, I believe you risk denying women the God-given right to prioritize their own wellbeing.

In addition, I believe that abortion is a health care. I am guided by Jewish teachings that demand that health care not only be between a patient and their doctor, but that the whole society is responsible for making sure health care is accessible as well. It is for this reason that Maimonides, a revered Jewish scholar and physician, listed health care first on his list of the ten most important communal services that a city has to offer to its residents (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot IV: 23).

In summary, as an American, a South Carolina resident, and a Jewish adult, I believe it is my right to my body and the choice of healthcare I receive. It is my choice to the type of care I

¹ https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/health-of-women-and-children/measure/maternal_mortality/state/SC

choose to seek and not that of the 84.1% male dominated South Carolina Congress. Although your opinions are respected on many ideas, the personal decision to have an abortion is not a decision that male public figures, like those in the South Carolina General Assembly will ever need to face. Although I have never had an abortion, constitutionally, it is my right to my own body and if I choose that it is not the right time, financially, professionally, or emotionally, to carry a child to term, it should be my personal decision.

By implementing H. 3020, the South Carolina General Assembly is denying women the right to their bodies and their health. This proposal will bring government into the people's personal lives and will take away the freedom of South Carolina residents to determine what is best for their bodies, families, and futures.

As a resident of South Carolina, a Reform Jew and a woman of reproductive age, **I strongly urge you to vote in opposition of H.3020**, and support healthcare and the personal freedom of the people in our state. By opposing this bill, you can send a clear message to the people of South Carolina that you respect our privacy and judgement to do what is best for ourselves and our health.

Thank you for your consideration.

Charlie Forstein