

SC Senate Medical Affairs Sub-Committee SC – H3020
Subcommittee for Public Hearings Tuesday, September 10, 2019

Good afternoon Senators.

I am the Reverend Canon Patricia C. Malanuk (Patsy),
a priest on the staff of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral.

I stand before you as an ordained clergy person who strongly opposes H3020.

In that, I represent the prayerfully considered views, not just of my own,
but the views of very large numbers of people in South Carolina,

including Episcopalians, American Baptists, Evangelical Lutherans, United Methodists,
members of the Presbyterian Church US, conservative and reform Judaism,
the United Church of Christ and many others who have given serious theological thought
and prayer to the issue of abortion,

and who understand and accept the complexity of this issue, not coming to any one simple solution
– as H3020 would purport to do – because there is no one simple solution to this issue.

Many religious people who might oppose the use of abortion as a means of birth control,
or for family planning, or for gender selection, or, as the Episcopal Church, my church, says,
“for a reason of mere convenience,” many of these people of faith
are at the same time, deeply opposed to the legislation of reproduction healthcare decisions.

As the Episcopal Church stated as early as 1967, we are “unequivocally opposed to any legislation
on the part of the state or national governments which would abridge or deny the right of individuals
to reach informed decisions about the termination of a pregnancy and to act upon them.”
(General Convention of the Episcopal Church 1967)

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2018 called for “women’s reproductive health
and reproductive health procedures to be treated as all other medical procedures,”

declaring that “equitable access to women’s health care, including women’s reproductive health care,
is an integral part of a woman’s struggle to assert her dignity and worth as a human being.”

The Episcopal Church continues, “Legislating abortions will not address the root of the problem.
We therefore express our deep conviction that any proposed legislation on the part of national
or state governments must take special care to see that the individual conscience is respected,
and that the responsibility of individuals to reach informed decisions in this matter
is acknowledged and honored as the position of this Church.”

This “Fetal Heartbeat Protection from Abortion Act” in which a woman’s physician
is under constraint and threat of felony action, describes a doctor/patient relationship
which is about as far from respecting individual conscience
and reaching an informed decision as anyone could imagine.

As a teenager in the early to mid 1960's I remember well the days before Roe V. Wade, when abortion was illegal. When doctors could not legally do anything to help a pregnant woman facing a difficult medical condition. This bill clearly seems like a step back to those dark days.

Abortions still happened during those years, of course, as they will if this bill passes, abortions still happened, often with tragic results, and I remember hearing horror stories, and asking myself whether I could ever imagine myself having an abortion.

As an ordained person who hears about the suffering of many people, I have come to know that it is a foolish thing to try to answer questions like that unless I am able to walk in the other person's shoes.

I do regular ministry at the women's prison, Camille Griffin Graham Correctional Institution, and I see good women leave there, women I have come to respect and love, so determined to make a new life, and facing almost impossible odds.

And I know it is women like these who will bear the brunt of this bill. With few resources, these women will have an extremely difficult time getting any regular health care at all, and policies like those in H3020 will put them in even deeper jeopardy.

It is true that states that have more abortion restrictions tend to have poorer health outcomes for women and children than other states. This bill is a perfect example of an injustice that our state government can avoid simply by voting NO.

I will close with a completely different story about a young couple I have been in communication with – they could be anybody's children, both hardworking and successful. Family and friends were thrilled to hear that they were expecting a baby.

A few months later the word came that there was a catastrophic genetic problem. They researched, and they sought advice from their doctor, and their families, and their priest.

Most people probably expected they would choose abortion. They did not choose abortion. It was their own choice. An informed personal decision, respecting their own individual consciences.

Another family might make a very different decision. An equally informed decision, respecting their individual consciences. This is the way it should be.

It is not appropriate for government to dictate private medical decisions. Please vote to defeat H3020.