

Statement in Opposition to H.3020

The Rev. Dr. Jeremy Rutledge, September 10, 2019

Good morning, and thank you to the Medical Affairs Committee for receiving my testimony. I am the Rev. Dr. Jeremy Rutledge, pastor of the Circular Congregational Church in downtown Charleston. We are a member church of the United Church of Christ. I have served in parish ministry for close to 20 years now. Before that, I served for several years as a hospital chaplain, bioethicist, and convener of our hospital's ethics committee. I stand as a Christian, a minister, and a citizen opposed to H.3020.

When I learned of this bill, and the attempt to rush it through while the legislature is out of session, I was immediately flooded by images of women I had known in the hospital.

I thought, in particular, of a woman I spent two days with in the hospital. After learning that her pregnancy posed a threat to her life, she made the extremely difficult decision to end her pregnancy. I remember how frightened her children and her husband were that they would lose her. I thought also of a close colleague, a pastor whose doctor shared the news that her baby would not live, and they needed to discuss how best to care for her as her pregnancy posed significant risk. I remember her anguish.

Yet H.3020 would take control of medical treatment and decisions away from women. Shockingly, this bill would ban all abortions as early as six weeks, before many women even know they are pregnant. This violates all of the basic rules of bioethics, including these three:

First, every person has the right to make decisions about what happens to their body.

Second, medical ethics are complex and no two situations are exactly the same.

Third, our religious and philosophical traditions are not in agreement about matters such as contraception, abortion, and reproductive ethics, and we must respect that every person will draw on their own traditions and understanding as they make ethical decisions.

The bill under consideration today fails to respect the rights of women as moral agents. It fails to trust women to make their own decisions. It fails to treat women equally to men, whose reproductive decisions the state has not sought to regulate and interfere with. As a citizen of South Carolina, I am deeply troubled that such legislation has made it this far. I ask and expect this body to treat the women of our state with the respect and dignity they deserve. Rather than taking health care options away from women in South Carolina, we would be better served if you would help us expand care to women and all who need it.

This leads me to my final objection, with which I will conclude my statement: I object to H.3020 as a Christian. My faith teaches a Golden Rule, wherein we should treat others in the way we ourselves would want to be treated. I believe that every person on this committee, and every person in this room, would like to be able to choose what happens to their own body, and, in consultation with their doctor, make the medical and ethical choices that are right for them. None of us has the right to step into

anyone else's hospital room and tell them and their doctors what to do. And this committee should not legislate discrimination against women by restricting their rights to health care and decision making. We can trust women to make their own decisions.

Thank you.