

Joy Koesten

3310 W 137th Street

913-972-7883

Leawood, KS 66224

From: Dr. Joy Koesten
Leawood, Kansas

To: Special Committee of Federal and State Affairs
Tuesday, January 21, 2020 - Room 346-S

Topic: Oral and Written Testimony in Opposition to HCR 5019 & SCR 1613

Honorable committee members. As many of you know, I am a former member of the Kansas House of Representatives and I thank you for this opportunity to speak before you. But today I come to you as a Jewish citizen who lives in House District 28 and Senate District 11.

I also come to you today as someone who values human life. In fact, I've never met anyone who doesn't value human life, but I do know women who have had to terminate a pregnancy.

Last year, the Kansas Supreme Court ruled that the Kansas Constitution protects a woman's right to a safe and legal abortion. These rights include the right to make decisions about her body, including the decision as to whether she will continue her pregnancy and that the State may only infringe upon her rights unless the State has a compelling interest and has narrowly tailored its actions to that interest.

This bill would render that Supreme Court's decision moot and strip the rights of self-determination and autonomy to half of our population.

There is no other life event that will alter the trajectory of a woman's life as does bearing a child. It is profound. Pregnancy disrupts a woman's physical being for nine months, it disrupts her ability to keep a job and earn a living, it disrupts her family system, and it disrupts her life's ambition. These are all acceptable outcomes if the woman is ready and willing to set aside all else and get pregnant. Millions of us do it over our lifetimes and it is a gift!

But I also know that women face situations that will cause them to seek a safe and legal abortion. In fact, one in four of us will do so over our lifetime. And, the majority of women who seek an abortion already have children and understand all too well the consequences of their gut-wrenching decision to terminate their pregnancy.

Patrick Carolan and Brian McLaren argued in their article last week in the National Catholic Reporter, "the fact is that life and choice are not mutually exclusive, and in a democracy, we can hold our own moral convictions about life and choice, rooted in our religious traditions, without feeling that others should be forced to live by them."

Women don't live their lives in the false dichotomy of pro-life or pro-choice. They live their lives in the challenging grey area, where answers aren't always so easy. Their decision to seek a safe and legal abortion should be made in consultation with their doctor, their family, and their faith leader. Not the government.

For so many years, our focus in Kansas has been to restrict access to safe and legal abortion services and I understand how that came to be. We now have one of the most restrictive states in the entire country when it comes to safe, legal abortion services. But we have done very little to expand services for family planning, prenatal and maternal care.

In fact, over the past 7 years the Kansas legislature has passed no fewer than 11 bills that restrict access to safe and legal abortion services. But ONLY three bills have been passed to ensure women have access to coordinated, comprehensive family planning and maternal care across our state. In 2014, publicly funded centers in Kansas only met 17% of the need for publicly funded family planning and maternal care services.

Consequently, the policy decisions of this deliberative body have led to some miserable outcomes for women and children in Kansas today:

- Today, 45% of all pregnancies in Kansas are UNPLANNED
- Today, over 140,000 Kansas women have no access to family planning services, including birth control
- Today, over 140,000 Kansas children receive food stamps
- Today, over 90,000 Kansas children are enrolled in the WIC program
- Today, over 30,000 Kansas children have been reported neglected or abused
- Today, over 7,500 Kansas children are in foster care
- And today, over 6,000 Kansas women have no access to prenatal care

Today, American women are 3 times more likely than Canadian women to die while pregnant; they are 6 times more likely than Scandinavian women to die while pregnant.

If the members of this committee truly want to support pro-life policies and reduce the number of abortions, please.... Focus on policies that will help women prevent unwanted pregnancies as well as policies that ensure that a woman and her fertilized egg will have only the best of care from conception to old age.

But above all else, I urge you to vote against this bill to ensure that all Kansans are afforded our Constitutional right to self-determination and autonomy.

Respectfully submitted

Joy Koesten, PhD