

As I am not able to attend the hearing today in person, please receive my written testimony below regarding the H.57 bill.

I pastor a church in Vergennes, VT and several in this congregation have cared for children through adoption and foster care. Children not born into a family who could raise them are being loved and included among those I pastor. I offer the following testimony from my own experiences and convictions. The congregation I serve has also encouraged me to speak up regarding this bill.

As the law currently stands, women who face an unplanned pregnancy are often *encouraged* to have an abortion, and are rarely informed about all the options. Pregnancy Care Centers, which some have criticized for having a pro-life bias, do share multiple options with the women, do not manipulate clients in their decision, and support families who decide to parent children in very difficult circumstances. The story is often told this way: Religious people have an ideology against abortion but those who are for women's choice are enlightened and free. But being a champion of abortion is an ideological position with its own assumptions and blindspots. This ideology, not any specific problematic situations or circumstances, appears to be driving this bill. I have been unable to find any specific grounds for this bill.

I will never forget visiting a woman in the hospital who was being treated for substance abuse and had attempted suicide three times. After spending some time listening to her speak about her tumultuous life, I discovered she was plagued with regret for having an abortion. This was not guilt anyone else inflicted upon her, but something that had arisen from her own conscience. Furthermore, she told me other therapists had dismissed this and not let her talk about it. My listening and counsel brought some measure of healing, and I was recognized by my supervisor for excellent work in this clinical setting. If one searches for "abortion regret" on YouTube, one can find testimony after testimony of women who now wish they would have made a different choice, along with videos downplaying such testimonies. If a fetus has no value and therefore deserves no rights, why would anyone grieve its death? Why would anyone regret an abortion? One has to pretend this reality does not exist to believe bill H.57 will serve a net common good.

There was a time when people from both political viewpoints tried to work together. Hillary Clinton was known for advocating making abortion "safe, legal, and rare." Working alongside conservatives she emphasized proper education, access to birth control, and assistance programs that help break cycles of poverty to see abortions become rare. We used to all agree that the ideal world would be one where these kinds of decisions do not need to be made and lament the existence of abortion, even as we differed over the morality of this practice. Today, to our shame, we cheer the ongoing reality of abortions. Why do we celebrate this "solution" to painful situations that involves the termination of human life inside the womb? If lawmakers were truly in touch with such people and their circumstances, they would grieve all of this.

In conclusion, the main reason I speak against bill H.57 is that it removes all rights from unborn children. One should be cautious, regardless of one's political leanings, to write into law that someone or something has no rights. At the very least, a developing human being ought to have some value and some rights. We protect the eggs of endangered animal species. We grieve the death of our child when enduring a miscarriage. To move from saying there is some value to a fetus to saying there is no value to a fetus is a drastic move, and one that has consequences far

beyond the decision-making situations our lawmakers are trying to protect. Please do not pass bill H.57.

Respectfully submitted,

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