



July 12, 2016

RE: Vote NO on the Conscience Protection Act (S.304)

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union, please find attached our letter urging a NO vote on the Conscience Protection Act (S.304). The bill would facilitate discrimination against women seeking abortion care while purporting to protect religious liberty.

Please contact Georgeanne Usova at (202) 675-2338 or gusova@aclu.org with any questions.

Regards,

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ACLU Recommends a NO Vote on the Conscience Protection Act (S. 304)

The bill would facilitate discrimination against women seeking abortion care while purporting to protect religious liberty.

The Conscience Protection Act would expand and make permanent the so called “Weldon Amendment” – an annual rider to the Labor-HHS appropriations bill that is intended to restrict women’s access to abortion care under the guise of protecting religious liberty. This rider pressures any federal agency or program or any state or local government with the potential loss of all of its Labor-HHS funding if it doesn't allow a health care entity to refuse to provide, pay for, cover, or refer for abortions.

The Conscience Protection Act would make this right to refuse much broader—allowing employers and insurance companies, among other “health care entities”— to refuse to “facilitate,” “make arrangements for,” or “otherwise participate in” abortions. This significant expansion would allow a woman’s boss to deprive her of comprehensive health insurance coverage and prevent her from fully participating in her own personal health care decisions. It could also endanger women’s health in emergency situations. For example, a hospital that objects to performing an abortion needed to preserve a woman’s health might also refuse to facilitate her care by giving her full information about her condition or to make arrangements for her care by transferring her to another hospital.

Additionally, the Conscience Protection Act would give virtually any individual or entity standing to sue for an actual or threatened violation. This broad right of action would chill state, local, and federal governments’ ability to advance pro-women’s health policies by exposing them to frivolous, resource-draining lawsuits by opponents of safe, legal abortion.

Religious liberty is one of our nation’s most fundamental and cherished values. It guarantees everyone the freedom to believe what they choose and to act on those beliefs, but it does not allow anyone to discriminate against or harm others in the name of religion. The Conscience Protection Act uses the cover of religious liberty to allow discrimination against women seeking constitutionally- protected health care.

For the above reasons, the ACLU urges you to vote NO on the Conscience Protection Act (S.304).