Michigan Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
PO Box 739 • East Lansing MI 48826 •www.mircrc.org

September 9, 2009

The Michigan Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice urges the House Judiciary Committee to pass the Prevention First Package. Expanding access to health care and education will help prevent unintended pregnancies, honor the rights and dignity of individuals, and keep the women, men, and teens in our state healthy.

HB 5156 and HB 5157 provide contraceptive equity. Religious groups are deeply concerned about the impact of unintended pregnancies. We believe that every effort to assist women in making responsible choices around the timing of when to have children is of great importance.

Prices for birth control are skyrocketing. Women who want to make responsible decisions around reproductive health are struggling to afford their birth control and can be faced with impossible choices between paying for prescriptions versus other basic necessities. These women should be encouraged and assisted, not penalized with unnecessary barriers than can easily be fixed by making them a part of health insurance prescription coverage.

The legislation does not compel any employers-religious or otherwise-to provide contraceptive coverage. But it does mandate that if an employer chooses to provide prescription coverage for its employees such policies cannot exclude prescription contraceptives. Contraception is a basic health need for women. When employers exclude contraception from otherwise comprehensive prescription drug plans they discriminate against women. Studies show that women pay 68 percent more than men in out-of-pocket expenses for health care, and the primary reason for the discrepancy is reproductive health care costs.

HB 5155 would require emergency room staff to offer emergency contraception to victims of sexual assault.

This bill is an affirmation of women's humanity and women's physical, emotional and spiritual power within themselves to make the best decision for their own care. To withhold from a rape victim information necessary to her medical care and future well-being is a moral and ethical travesty. Women who have suffered a sexual assault and come to an emergency room for care have a right to be treated with dignity and respect, and provided with all the information they need to make informed decisions about their care. This includes information on how to prevent conception due to the rape. Women who have been traumatized by rape deserve not to be further traumatized by the possibility of pregnancy.

Let us remove all stumbling blocks from the path of women seeking help and compassion. Let us support women's emotional health and well-being by preventing them from receiving the health care they need.

HB 5164 would require pharmacists to fill prescriptions without bias.

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There is no single "religious" view on health care issues. Emergency contraception is one of the health care issues on which people's divergent views have led to public controversy. Timely and dignified access to health care is a broad moral and religious issue among many faiths.

In matters of faith, one person's conscience ends where another's begins. We believe strongly in individual religious liberty; at the same time, we believe that society has a responsibility to ensure that exercise of this liberty does not harm others.

We wish to correct the implication that only one religious view is at stake in the regulation of health care and the dispensation of medial treatment, and to correct the implication that religion and religious organizations broadly oppose any and all regulations or standards that touch the exercise of religious beliefs. Religious liberty and government regulation cannot always be mutually exclusive.

Pharmacists have rights and religious freedoms but patients have rights and are entitled to protection of their religious and ideological freedom too. Inevitably, beliefs will diverge. Protection of religious freedom for all is especially vital in health care because religious and personal beliefs regarding health care matters are widely diverse. Some pharmacists argue for their own protection but not the same protection for the convictions of other members of the population, most notably patients.

A faithful, responsible woman' decisions about her health care, her decisions about pregnancy and her rights to that care can be at risk and even violated because some pharmacists believe their own morality trumps the woman's, even to the point that she runs the risk of a pregnancy that she does not want.

Government regulation must accommodate all religious and personal views and practices to the greatest extent possible while preventing harm to others.

HB 5165 helps raise awareness about emergency contraception. Emergency contraception is 75% effective at preventing a pregnancy if started within 120 hours of unprotected intercourse. When talking with medical students about reproductive health at one of the state's medical schools, we discovered that many of them did not realize the difference between emergency contraception and the abortion pill. Therefore, we believe providing the public with accurate information is critical.

HB 5163 requires providing age-appropriate, medically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education.
We have a responsibility to ensure youth have information and tools to make responsible and moral decisions so they may protect themselves and their partners. Youth need the ability to appropriately trust and defer to see sexuality in a context larger than immediate personal gratification. As people created in the image of God and asked to be stewards of all of God's creation, we have been entrusted with our bodies and sexuality. They are sacred things as such, we adults have a responsibility to provide our youth with the tools they need to be responsible stewards of their bodies and sexuality. We can be stewards of sexuality for our children to see it as something beautiful and spiritual to help keep our children safe.

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The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice has over 1,000 members in Michigan. Members are clergy and lay people from mainstream religions who believe women need more than prayer to prevent unintended pregnancy. Please support the Prevention First legislation.

Respectfully submitted by,

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