



CONNECTICUT CATHOLIC PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONFERENCE  
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## TESTIMONY

Opposition to

*HB 5424*

*“An Act Prohibiting Adverse Actions Against Health Care Providers for Providing Certain Health Care Services”*

### **PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE**

Public Hearing

March 13, 2024

The Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference stands strongly in opposition to HB 5424, which is a blatant attack on Catholic healthcare and religious freedom in our state. This proposed legislation is framed as a bill to protect women’s access to “reproductive health care services” and a transgender persons’ access to “gender-affirming health care services.”

HB 5424 undermines Catholic hospitals in our state, which operate under ethical and moral guidelines which limit such services. HB 5424 clearly reflects an obtuse viewpoint when it comes to the teachings of the Church on abortion and gender-identity.

This legislation is reflective of a national trend by advocates of abortion and transgender care to attack Catholic healthcare institutions across our country. HB 5424 cleverly omits using the term “Catholic” in its wording, but past and current statements by advocates, through their constant use of the word “religious,” leaves no doubt as to its intentions. This bill would not be necessary if the restrictions at Catholic hospitals did not exist.

HB 5424 is an effort to weaken the oversight and control Catholic hospitals must maintain over their providers to ensure compliance with the [\*Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Services \(ERDs\)\*](#), under which all Catholic hospitals operate. Under the *ERDs*, Catholic hospitals and their staff are prohibited from performing or being in any way involved in abortions, sterilization, certain fertility treatments, birth control, and gender-affirming healthcare. These *ERDs* include referrals for these services. Although many people may see the *ERDs* as restrictive, they are the same directives that also stress the quality of care a patient should receive within a Catholic hospital.

Catholic hospitals provide quality health care in Connecticut and across our nation. Abortion advocates, who support this type of legislation, fail to recognize the vast number of quality services Catholic hospitals, including a wide array of healthcare services for women. The services not provided by Catholic hospitals and clinics can easily be obtained at other healthcare institutions in our state, who advertise for these services. Section 3 of the bill references the providing of these services in an emergency department. However, the services limited by the *ERDs* are very rarely, if at all, emergency situations and can be sought at non-Catholic hospitals without any impact on the patient.

The inclusion of “gender-affirming health care” in the proposed legislation also creates a serious problem. The language in Section 2 states that a provider is protected for sharing “comprehensive medically accurate and appropriate information...that conforms to the accepted standard of care” to a person

suffering from gender dysphoria. An “accepted standard of care” in this context is debatable and undefined. The treatment of persons with gender dysphoria is still under dispute in the medical community. Gender-affirming care, which automatically recognizes a person’s self-proclaimed gender, is only one approach to treating gender dysphoria and lacks any significant findings as to its effectiveness. There is another approach that challenges the person’s self-proclamation, requires a significant mental health evaluation, and no medical procedures.

Although few, if any, Catholic hospitals practice gender-affirming care, and the medical procedures it ultimately involves, it is important to note that the Catholic Bishops have directed the ERD’s be studied and updated concerning treatment for gender dysphoria. If the revised ERDs support the second option for treating gender-dysphoria, HB 5424 would allow providers in Catholic hospitals to recommend gender-affirming care in violation of hospital policy. All references to “gender-affirming healthcare” should be removed from this legislation. Otherwise, this committee would be deciding to support only one approach to treating gender dysphoria.

The Conference urges the committee to reject HB 5424 because it is a direct attack on the religious freedom of Catholic healthcare institutions to enforce their ethical and moral guidelines on their employees. Passage of this legislation will not improve healthcare in our state, but may very well be the first step in forcing Catholic healthcare institutions to perform abortions and provide gender-affirming care.

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