

Name: Lisa Maloney
Title: President
Organization or Agency: CT Pregnancy Care Coalition
Topic: HB0516 - AAC REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.
Opposes

Testimony:

Subject: Opposition to HB 5016 – Protecting Religious Liberty and Freedom of Conscience

Dear Members of the Committee,

I write to respectfully express my opposition to HB 5016, An Act Concerning Reproductive Rights. While the stated purpose of the bill is to protect access to certain health care services, its language raises serious concerns regarding the protection of religious liberty and freedom of conscience for faith-based organizations serving in Connecticut.

My name is Lisa A. Maloney, LMFT. I serve as the Executive Director of Anchor of Hope and as the President of the Connecticut Pregnancy Care Coalition, representing pregnancy care centers across the state.

Anchor of Hope is a Christian pregnancy and family resource center and a licensed outpatient clinic classified under family planning in the state of Connecticut. Our medical services include pregnancy testing, limited ultrasound, and health education. In addition, we provide parenting education, fatherhood mentoring, counseling, and material support to individuals and families facing unexpected pregnancies and difficult life circumstances.

We serve both women and men, helping mothers navigate pregnancy while also equipping fathers to take responsibility and become engaged parents. Each year we walk alongside hundreds of individuals who are often in vulnerable and uncertain situations. All of our services are provided free of charge and with deep compassion and respect for every person who comes through our doors.

However, our ability to provide this care is inseparable from our religious mission. Anchor of Hope exists because individuals of faith felt called to serve vulnerable families in a way that reflects Christian convictions about life, family, and human dignity. Our staff and volunteers freely choose to participate in this mission with the understanding that the organization operates according to clearly defined moral and religious principles.

HB 5016 raises concern because it risks eroding long-standing legal protections that allow faith-based ministries to operate according to those convictions. The *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC* decision affirmed that the First Amendment protects the autonomy of religious organizations in matters of internal governance and mission. Likewise, the Supreme Court recognized in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* that individuals and organizations cannot be compelled by government action to violate sincerely held religious beliefs. More recently, *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis* reaffirmed that the government may not compel individuals or organizations to communicate or support messages that conflict with their deeply held convictions.

These decisions affirm a fundamental principle: religious freedom protects not only belief but also the ability to live out those beliefs through one's work, ministry, and service to others.

Legislation that pressures faith-based organizations to act contrary to their mission raises serious concerns related to compelled speech and freedom of conscience. Ministries should not be required to promote, facilitate, or affirm practices that directly contradict their religious convictions. For

organizations like Anchor of Hope, this would force a choice between violating conscience or withdrawing from serving the community altogether.

Organizations like Anchor of Hope are not merely service providers; they are ministries. The counseling, education, and support we offer flow directly from our faith and our commitment to uphold the dignity of every human life.

Allow me to briefly share one story that illustrates the work we do.

A young woman came to Anchor of Hope feeling overwhelmed and alone after discovering she was pregnant. She believed abortion was her only option and felt there was no support for her if she chose otherwise. During her visit she received a pregnancy test, an ultrasound, and time to speak with one of our advocates. For the first time, she was able to see her baby on the screen and hear that she was not alone. We also invited the father of the baby to participate in our fatherhood program so he could learn how to support both her and their child.

Over time, both parents began attending classes together. They learned practical parenting skills, received material support, and built a support system. Today they are raising their child together and often return to tell new clients that there is hope even in the most uncertain moments.

Stories like this are possible because ministries like Anchor of Hope are free to serve according to their faith and mission.

Faith-based organizations also play an essential role in Connecticut's network of care. Through the Connecticut Pregnancy Care Coalition, pregnancy centers across the state collectively serve thousands of women, men, and families each year through medical services, education, mentoring, and practical support. Many individuals intentionally seek out our centers because they are looking for compassionate care grounded in faith and respect for life.

True pluralism in our society means allowing diverse organizations to serve according to their convictions. Those who wish to provide certain services should be free to do so through institutions that support those practices. At the same time, faith-based ministries must remain free to operate according to their beliefs without fear of legal penalty, coercion, or government intrusion into matters of conscience.

Protecting religious liberty does not diminish access to services; rather, it ensures that a wide range of organizations can continue serving our communities. Weakening those protections risks discouraging faith-based providers from continuing their work, ultimately reducing the support available to vulnerable women, men, and families.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 5016 or amend it in a way that clearly and explicitly protects the religious liberty and freedom of conscience of faith-based organizations and ministries, including those like Anchor of Hope that are committed to serving both women and men with compassion, integrity, and faith.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of the importance of safeguarding religious freedom in our state.

Respectfully,
Lisa A. Maloney, LMFT
Executive Director, Anchor of Hope
President, Connecticut Pregnancy Care Coalition