



TESTIMONY by
Deacon David Reynolds
in Opposition

HB 5516 "AN ACT CONCERNING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS"

PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Public Hearing
March 13, 2026

The Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference stands strongly in opposition to HB 5516 *An Act Concerning Reproductive Rights*. This proposed legislation is designed to prevent Catholic hospitals from enforcing the "***Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Services***" (ERDs) ¹ which set the ethical and moral standard of care for Catholic hospitals, including the prohibition against cooperation with abortions and gender-affirming treatments. The bill is a blatant and unnecessary attack on Catholic healthcare and religious freedom in our state. **The ERDs have been adhered to for decades by Connecticut's Catholic hospitals, without any clear evidence of harm being incurred by persons desiring these services.**

HB 5516 Exists Because Catholic Healthcare Exists – a clear attack on religious liberty

The true goal of HB 5516, despite the generality of the language, is to prohibit Catholic hospitals from reprimanding a medical provider for their involvement in providing services related to abortion or gender-affirming care. This legislation is reflective of a national trend by advocates of abortion and transgender care to attack Catholic healthcare institutions. Seeking to justify the correctness of their beliefs on these issues, the advocates and their political allies attack one of the last strongholds opposed to those beliefs, the Catholic Church and its related healthcare facilities.

This is the third year this type of legislation has come before this committee. HB 5516, like previously proposed legislation, cleverly omits using the term "Catholic" in its wording. However, past and current statements by advocates, through their constant use of the word "religious," leaves no doubt as to its intentions. **If Catholic hospitals did not exist this legislation would not even be under consideration by this committee.**

Misunderstanding of the Application of the ERDs in Relation to Abortion

The ERDs focus on prohibiting the *procedure* and *referral* for abortion. They do not explicitly prohibit physicians from providing comprehensive medical information to a patient, though they strongly limit discussions that would promote or facilitate a non-approved, direct abortion. However, it is inconceivable that any qualified and licensed medical provider in a Catholic hospital would not explain the medical facts of an abortion procedure to an inquiring patient without using accurate medical information. This is not a violation of the ERDs. What is a violation is providing counseling, making referrals, or providing medication to a patient that results in an abortion.

¹ https://www.usccb.org/resources/ERDs-7th-ed-Approved_2025-11-12.pdf

Medically Accurate Information and Care for Gender Dysphoria is a Moving Target – any reference to this care should be removed from the bill

The ERDs do ban any cooperation with a patient seeking gender transitioning. HB 5516 would allow providers at Catholic hospitals to counsel patients on medically accurate “gender-affirming health care services”. The inclusion of “gender-affirming health care services” in the proposed legislation creates a serious problem. Serious enough that any reference to gender-affirming care should be removed from the bill

The language in the bill states that a provider is protected when sharing comprehensive medically accurate and appropriate information that conforms to the accepted standard of care. However, that “accepted standard of care” in this context has been reopened by recent comprehensive long-term studies, especially relating to the treatment of minors. **The treatment of people with gender dysphoria is now more than ever under dispute and under further review in the national and international medical community. This review is not based on politics but on scientific comprehensive long-term studies.**

In February, The American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) issued a new policy statement² that surgeries should no longer be performed on minors based on new comprehensive studies. Immediately following the statement by the ASPS the American Medical Association adopted the same position.³ Internationally, several nations, including Finland, Sweden, Norway and the United Kingdom, are replacing their standard of care for minors with gender-dysphoria to an approach based focused more on mental health, moving away from surgeries, hormone therapy and puberty blockers.⁴

To statutorily remove management control over the type of gender-affirming care being shared by medical providers with their patients in a Catholic hospital, when it is a moving target, should not remain in this bill.

Creates an Ironic Situation for Legal Liability – imagine a Catholic hospital being involved in a lawsuit for abortion complications or gender-affirming care because of actions of one of their providers

HB 5516 mandates that Catholic hospitals allow their medical providers to discuss services limited by the ERDs they operate under but does not excuse them from any legal liability they may encounter due to the actions of one of its providers. It creates a situation where a hospital policy, violated by force of law, could result in the hospital being a party to a lawsuit brought by a patient. Example, a teen who transitioned under counseling from a Catholic hospital provider has decided they were misled by all medical parties involved in their transitioning and sues. This creates a situation that is blatantly unfair to the Catholic hospital because the state removed their management oversight authority under this proposed bill. A woman just won a \$2 million settlement in New York because she was transitioned when she was sixteen.⁵

HB 5516 is a flawed bill in many ways, in addition to being a direct attack religious freedom. The Conference urges the committee to reject HB 5516.

² <https://www.plasticsurgery.org/documents/health-policy/positions/2026-gender-surgery-children-adolescents.pdf>

³ <https://www.empr.com/news/american-medical-association-says-gender-surgeries-for-minors-should-wait/#:~:text=American%20Medical%20Association%20Says%20Gender,become%20more%20common%20for%20minors.>

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshuacohen/2023/06/06/increasing-number-of-european-nations-adopt-a-more-cautious-approach-to-gender-affirming-care-among-minors/>

⁵ <https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/woman-awarded-2-million-by-jury-in-malpractice-suit-over-gender-surgery>