



Tonishia Signore, MSW  
Policy Director, She Leads Justice

## **HB 5516 An Act Concerning Reproductive Rights**

Public Health Committee Public Hearing

March 13, 2026

Senator Anwar, Representative McCarthy-Vahey and members of the Connecticut General Assembly's Public Health Committee,

My name is Tonishia Signore, and I am the Policy Director at She Leads Justice (SLJ) and I am submitting this testimony **in support of HB 5516 An Act Concerning Reproductive Rights**.

SLJ is a statewide nonprofit that uses a justice and equity lens to advocate for under-resourced and marginalized women and girls in Connecticut. For over fifty years, we have been a leading advocate for policy solutions to enhance women's economic security, combat discrimination, and increase gender equity.

This bill would protect providers' abilities to share medically accurate information, counseling, or make referrals for their patients who may be unable to access the reproductive health care they want and need simply because of a health care institution's religious or moral beliefs.

Federal religious refusal laws allow any provider, health care professional, or health care institution involved in patient care to refuse that care based on religious, moral, or conscientious objection.<sup>1</sup> These laws allow Catholic facilities to be governed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Services, which prohibit a range of reproductive health care services in Catholic health care facilities, including contraception counseling and access, tubal ligations or vasectomies, many fertility treatments, miscarriage treatment, and abortion.<sup>2</sup> Catholic hospitals in Connecticut include, Trinity Health, which operates St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Saint Mary's Hospital in Waterbury, Johnson Memorial Hospital in Stafford Springs, and Mount Sinai Rehabilitation Hospital in Hartford.<sup>3</sup> These hospitals account for a significant amount of hospital beds in the state, and providers at these institutions attend

---

<sup>1</sup> Protecting Statutory Conscience Rights in Health Care: Delegations of Authority, 84 Fed. Reg. 23,170 (May 21, 2019) (to be codified at 45 C.F.R. pt. 88).

<sup>2</sup> *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services: Sixth Edition*, U.S. CONF. OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (June 2018), [https://www.usccb.org/resources/ethical-religious-directives-catholic-health-service-sixth-edition-2016-06\\_0.pdf](https://www.usccb.org/resources/ethical-religious-directives-catholic-health-service-sixth-edition-2016-06_0.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *By The Numbers: Catholic Health Care Serving Connecticut*, CATHOLIC HEALTH ASS'N OF THE U.S. (Apr. 2023), <https://www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/state-fact-sheets/connecticut.pdf>.

thousands of births per year.<sup>4</sup> Medicaid and Medicare enrollees make up the majority of patient admissions for these Catholic hospitals.

Providers who work at Catholic health institutions may be restricted from providing reproductive and gender-affirming health care due to their workplace's directives- but they can also face employment repercussions for simply communicating with a patient accurately about their own health and where they can access care. Many patients receiving care at Catholic hospitals have limited options for where they can access care and are often not aware of a hospital's actual affiliation with the Catholic church, or the hospital's ability to restrict care practices due to that affiliation.

While federal attacks on reproductive and gender-affirming health care continue, it is essential Connecticut continues to update and adapt our health care policies to ensure (1) providers are protected from delivering necessary and medically accurate standards of care, and (2) patients have access to the correct information and tools to make informed decisions about their own health.

We urge the Committee to vote favorably in HB 5516 and thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this bill.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tonishia". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tonishia Signore

---

<sup>4</sup> CATHOLIC HEALTH ASS'N OF THE U.S., *supra* note 13.