

**Dr. Nancy Stanwood
Chief Medical Officer**

**Testimony of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
in support of raised House Bill 5516 *An Act Concerning Reproductive Rights*
March 13, 2026**

Senator Anwar, Representative McCarthy Vahey, and honorable members of the Public Health Committee:

I am Dr. Nancy Stanwood, a board certified OBGYN with over twenty-five years of experience in medical practice, and I have the honor of serving as the Chief Medical Officer at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. I am here today testifying in support of raised House Bill 5516 *An Act Concerning Reproductive Rights*. As the state's largest provider of sexual and reproductive health care to over 52,000 patients last year at 14 health centers across Connecticut, Planned Parenthood believes that all people should have access to high quality, affordable health care as a human right — regardless of who you are, where you live, your income, or if you have health insurance.

I am here before you again today to ask for your support for H.B. 5516, which aims to increase access to essential health information by specifically preventing health care institutions from prohibiting providers from offering medically accurate information regarding a patient's health status, counseling, and referrals specific to reproductive health and gender-affirming health care.

During a time when other states have created climates of fear, intimidation, and uncertainty for providers caring for patients seeking abortion care and gender-affirming care, Connecticut continues to make significant progress to protect patients and our state's health care providers, who are doing all that they can to provide medically-accurate and compassionate care and counseling to their patients — H.B. 5516 is an essential part of this work.

To be clear: this bill would not require any affirmative actions by a health care provider and would not create any new requirement compelling an institution to offer certain kinds of medical treatment, information, or referrals. Rather, this bill is intended to ensure that health care providers do not face disciplinary action for providing accurate and appropriate information and referrals to their patients.

And it also would serve to correct an imbalance in how we approach the issue of conscience in medicine. Historically, both federal and state governments have protected negative conscience — that is, protecting health care providers who opt out of providing care that violates their sense of conscience. *This bill would protect positive conscience. What is positive conscience?* I exercise my positive conscience in my medical practice by providing abortion care, which I see as a human right to dignity and bodily autonomy, and which my conscience compels me to provide. If I were forced not to provide abortion care, I would be morally injured. This bill would protect my exercise of positive conscience.

This is not theoretical to me. Many years ago, I was called in emergently to care for a patient hemorrhaging dangerously at 3 months of pregnancy — where the lifesaving care the patient needed was abortion care. The patient was at a hospital that forbids abortion care, and I needed special permission to provide an emergency abortion. How dangerous for the patient and how morally agonizing for me it would have been if the permission had been withheld or if even the discussion of the option of abortion were stifled.

When a patient goes to the hospital, they should be confident that their health care provider will be allowed to provide comprehensive and accurate information and counseling regarding reproductive health and gender-affirming health care. And providers should not be limited or barred from providing such critical information. This bill will support patient-centered, evidence-based, standard of care practice that protects the integrity of the provider-patient relationship. I strongly support H.B. 5516 and respectfully urge the Public Health Committee and Connecticut General Assembly to vote favorably. Thank you for your time and consideration of this legislation.