

Cardinal Tobin Why the Catholic Church opposes the Reproductive Freedom Act | Opinion

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Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, archbishop of Newark, says the Catholic Church's opposition to the proposed Reproductive Freedom Act is based on the church's absolute commitment to human life and dignity.

By Joseph W. Tobin

On Oct. 5, 2020, the Catholic bishops of the state of New Jersey [published a statement](#) that conveyed our “strongest possible opposition” to the proposed [Reproductive Freedom Act](#). At that time, we urged all Catholics and all people of goodwill to reject this proposed legislative initiative in our state and to contact their state legislators to express vigorous opposition to its passage. I would like to outline in simple, straightforward terms why we take this strong stand.

As our statement last October made clear, the Catholic Church believes and teaches that all human life is sacred from conception to natural death. That is why we oppose all threats to human life and dignity evident in contemporary society, including abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide and capital punishment. We join with Pope Francis in noting that the right to life of the unborn “is the most fundamental right. This is not first a religious issue; it is a human rights issue.” (Pope Francis to American Catholic Bishops, USCCB Region IX, January 16, 2020).

Our opposition to the proposed Reproductive Freedom Act is based on our absolute commitment to human life and dignity. The Catholic Church stands with all who advocate for civil rights and racial equality. We strongly support the right to quality healthcare for women and men in all regions of our state, regardless of their economic, social or religious status. We especially want to advocate for those in our communities who are poor or on the margins of our society.

For these reasons, we cannot support provisions of the proposed Reproductive Freedom Act that threaten the life of unborn children or remove existing laws and regulations that are intended to protect the life and health of mothers. For instance, if passed as written, clauses in [sections 2 and 3](#) of the Reproductive Freedom Act would codify a proposal by the State Board of Medical Examiners to amend certain rules for surgeries and procedures. We believe this would, in certain situations, allow non-physicians such as physician assistants and certified midwives to perform abortions in non-hospital settings any time throughout the nine months of pregnancy.

Finally, we cannot support any legislation that would eliminate New Jersey's longstanding legal tradition that protects the freedom of conscience of healthcare workers who do not want to perform or assist with abortions because doing so would violate their most fundamental beliefs as individuals and as healthcare providers. Based on my review, the absence of any language in the Act to protect this clause means that one could challenge, in court, a medical professional's decision not to perform an abortion for moral, religious, or ethical reasons.

Our opposition to this proposed legislation can be summarized in the following terms:

- Abortion is not healthcare, and we vigorously oppose all attempts to create a false equivalency between the taking of innocent human life and the “reproductive health” of women in our society.
- Justice demands that civil rights and racial equality must be guaranteed for all members of our society, especially for the most vulnerable members of our society, our unborn children. While section 2 of the proposed Act addresses the issue of barriers to healthcare faced by women of color, immigrants, and other disenfranchised and minority populations, it is not necessary to support this legislation to achieve civil rights and racial equality for women in our state. In fact, we believe that the proposed Reproductive Freedom Act does a particular disservice to women of color who are poor or socially disadvantaged because it denies them legal protections against what I personally view as unscrupulous policies or “services” that threaten human life and the dignity of mothers and their children.

The Catholic Church in New Jersey stands with all women and men regardless of race, religion, social or economic status in advocating for universal access to excellent healthcare. We also join with our fellow citizens in demanding that justice be guaranteed

for all members of our communities, no matter what their past background or current circumstances are.

We oppose the proposed Reproductive Freedom Act because we believe it is not the right way to safeguard the health and dignity of women and children, who are entitled to the best protection and care that our society can offer. We invite all members of our community to join us in letting state legislators and other public officials know that we continue to oppose this legislation in the strongest possible terms.

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R. is the archbishop of Newark.