

January 30, 2023

To: Montana House Judiciary Committee

From: Matthew Brower, Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference

Re: Testimony in support of HB 303

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Matt Brower and I currently serve as the Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference. I speak on behalf of the two Roman Catholic bishops of Montana.

I am here today to voice our support for House Bill 303.

The Catholic Church affirms rights of conscience as a foundational principle of a just society and a fundamental human right flowing from the inherent dignity of the human person. Indeed, Pope Francis has stated, “religious freedom, including freedom of conscience, rooted in the dignity of the person, is the cornerstone of all other freedoms. It is a sacred and inalienable right.”

And what is conscience?

Again, Pope Francis has said of conscience that it “is the interior space in which we can listen to and hear the truth, the good, the voice of God. It is the inner place of our relationship with Him, who speaks to our heart and helps us to discern, to understand the path we ought to take, and once the decision is made, to move forward, to remain faithful.”

In other words, it’s a sacred sanctuary where one stands alone with God.

I think most of us would agree that science and medicine are developing at a rate unprecedented in human history. This is not in and of itself a bad thing. It presents us with extraordinary opportunities to address the serious needs facing the human family. However, in the midst of such a rapidly changing scientific landscape, there is a risk that moral and ethical considerations are not adequately accounted for or weighed. In such situations, it is all that more essential that we do everything we can to protect rights of conscience for our health care providers.

Moreover, given the sacredness of conscience, in a pluralistic society we should commit to crafting our laws so that rights of conscience are safeguarded to the greatest extent possible ensuring that individuals will never be unnecessarily compelled to violate their deeply held beliefs. The state ought to protect the right of health care providers and institutions to act in accord with the values they hold dear and House Bill 303 makes clear that rights of conscience ought to be afforded serious protection under the law.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, on behalf of the Montana Catholic Conference, I urge a “do pass” and thank you for your time.