



REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS & HEALTH

PUT PATIENT HEALTH FIRST: OPPOSE RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION LAWS

A health care provider's religious beliefs should never determine the care a patient receives. Yet religious exemption laws allow health care providers like hospitals, doctors, nurses, and health insurance companies, to do just that—refuse to treat a woman seeking an abortion because of religious or moral beliefs.

Federal Religious Exemption Laws Allow Religious Beliefs to Dictate Patient Care

There are a number of federal laws – most notably the so-called Church Amendments,¹ Coats Amendment,² and Weldon Amendment³ – that allow various health care providers to refuse to provide care to a woman seeking an abortion. The Weldon Amendment – which is not permanent, but rather has been attached yearly to the annual Labor-HHS appropriations bill – is the most far-reaching. It allows insurance plans to refuse to cover a woman's abortion and even allows individual health care providers like doctors and nurses to refuse to provide women with referrals for abortion.

These religious exemption laws allow hospitals, doctors, and nurses to determine a patient's care based on religious beliefs, not based on what is best for the patient's health and circumstances.

Voters Oppose Religious Exemption Laws and Are Willing to Hold Elected Leaders Accountable

In a March 2017 nationally representative survey done on behalf of the National Women's Law Center, 61 percent of voters showed opposition to religious exemption laws.⁴

In addition:

- Sixty-three percent of voters oppose laws that allow hospitals to refuse to provide a woman with information or referrals about abortion because of religious or moral beliefs.
- Sixty-two percent of voters oppose laws that allow insurance companies to refuse to cover a woman's abortion because of religious or moral beliefs.
- Sixty-two percent of voters oppose laws that allow doctors or nurses to refuse to provide a woman with information or referrals about abortion because of religious or moral beliefs.

The survey also showed that voters are willing to hold their representatives in state legislatures and Congress accountable and are more likely to support him or her for voting against a religious exemption law.

Abortion Opponents are Seeking to Expand Religious Exemption Laws

Despite the widespread opposition, some members of Congress continue to push religious exemption laws in order to undermine women's access to abortion. Abortion opponents are calling for an expansion of the Weldon Amendment through measures like the Abortion Non-Discrimination Act (ANDA),⁵ the Health Care Conscience Rights Act (HCCRA),⁶ or the Conscience Protection Act (CPA).⁷

Religious exemption laws like these allow health care providers to place their religious beliefs ahead of patient care. Our government should instead be focused on ensuring that patients get the care they need, including abortion.



- 1 42 U.S.C. § 300a-7(c) (2017).
- 2 42 U.S.C. § 238n (2017).
- 3 Consolidated Appropriations Act 2017, Pub. L. No. 115-31, § 507 (2017).
- 4 GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH, VOTERS OPPOSE RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION LAWS: FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY OF VOTERS (May 3, 2017) available at <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/NWLC-Refusals-Memo-May-3-2017-1.pdf>.
- 5 ANDA has been introduced as a standalone bill and included in HCCRA, *infra*, note 6. See also S. 50, 114th Cong. (2015).
- 6 HCCRA has been introduced as a standalone bill and as a rider to the Labor-HHS appropriations bill. See e.g. S. 1919, 114th Cong. (2016).
- 7 H.R. 644, 115th Cong. (2017); S. 301, 115th Cong. (2017).

