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Voters Oppose Religious Exemption Laws

Findings from a National Survey of Voters

To: Interested Parties

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

A recent survey¹ indicates that U.S. voters oppose many aspects of religious exemption laws and proposals that allow health care providers—insurers, hospitals, and practitioners—to refuse access to abortion, birth control, and care for a miscarriage based on religious objections.

A plurality (49 percent) opposes religious exemption laws at the outset; after information on the consequences and drawbacks of these laws, a significant number of people change their mind to oppose them (61 percent). The strongest objections to these laws center on their ability to prevent a patient from getting the care she needs, including comprehensive, accurate information from her doctors, referrals for treatment, and treatment itself. Voters also oppose government-sanctioned discrimination that these laws allow, as they give taxpayer-funded entities like hospitals permission to refuse to provide services based on religious beliefs.

Voters believe that health insurance plans should cover a broad range of services, including abortion, and they strongly favor a number of forward-looking proposals that guarantee access to those services.

The following are key findings from a nationally representative telephone survey of 1,650 registered voters, conducted March 21-28, 2017 on behalf of the National Women's Law Center.

Key Findings

- **Americans believe health insurance plans should cover a broad range of health care services for women, including abortion.** Voters agree, by a nearly 2-1 margin (64 – 33 percent agree/disagree), that insurers should cover all basic health care services, including birth control, abortion, pre-natal care, childbirth, and post-partum care. Fully half strongly believe that health plans should provide full coverage for women's health care.

¹ The findings in this memo are based on a nationally representative telephone survey of 800 registered voters, oversamples of 50 African-American women and 50 Latinas, an additional 200 voters in Michigan, Virginia, and New Mexico, and 150 additional voters in Florida, for a total of 1,650 interviews. Forty-five percent of the interviews were conducted via cell phones. The data were weighted to reflect a representative sample of voters nationally. The results of the survey, conducted March 21-28, 2017, are subject to a margin of error of +/- 2.41 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.

- **Voters express strong concerns about religious exemption laws that allow insurers, hospitals, and other providers to refuse appropriate, needed care to patients based on religious objections.** After an initial neutral description, a plurality of voters (49 percent) oppose “religious exemption” or “conscience clauses.” However, the implications and consequences resulting from these laws cause many voters to switch from supporting to opposing these laws. Voters particularly object to entities like insurance companies or hospital systems having the ability to withhold medical treatment—as well as information and referrals to seek treatment elsewhere—based on religious beliefs.

Figure 1: Voters Oppose Religious Exemption Laws



- **Opposition to religious exemption laws grows significantly with information on both sides of the debate.** After hearing information in favor of and in opposition to religious exemption laws, opposition to these laws grows from 49 percent to 61 percent, with 43 percent of voters strongly opposing the laws. Majority opposition to these religious exemption laws includes voters who identify as Catholic (57 percent oppose) and as Protestant (51 percent oppose).
- **The most compelling concerns about religious exemption laws center on making sure a woman has access to the best patient care without interference.** U.S. voters believe they should be able to have access to the best information and care available, determined by them and their doctors, not health insurance companies, or hospitals. This idea is central to the key concerns voters express against these religious exemption laws, including:
 - The laws allow health care providers to place their religious beliefs ahead of comprehensive patient care—including preventing doctors and nurses from giving patients basic referrals and information about the best plan of care.

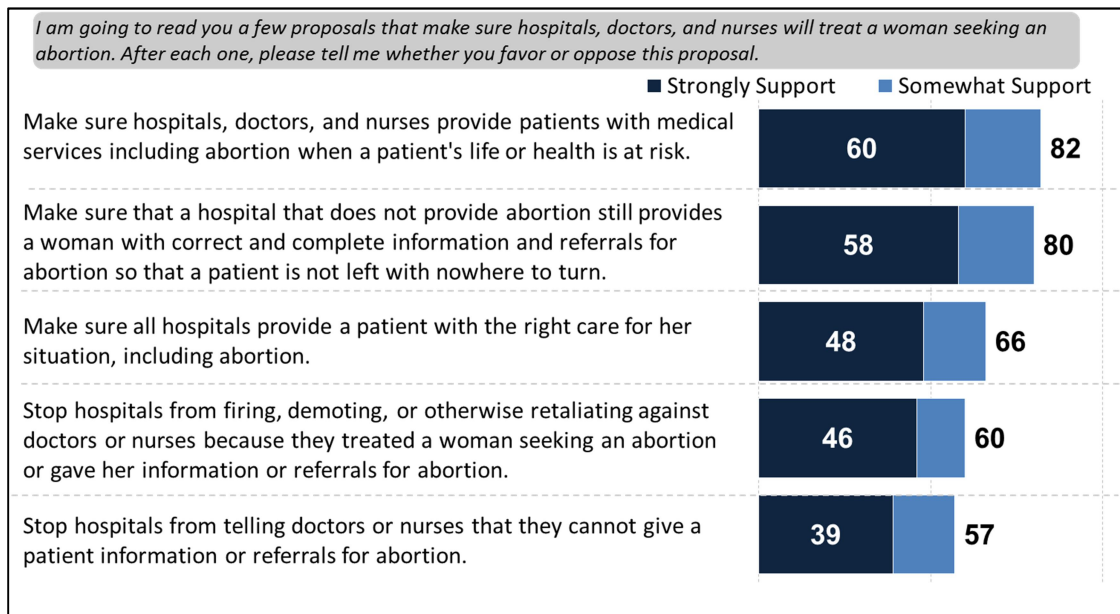
- The laws allow hospitals and other providers to refuse to provide needed treatments, which can and have put women's lives and health in danger.
- The laws allow taxpayer-funded hospitals to inappropriately interfere in patient care.

Figure 2: Strongest Concerns about Religious Exemption Laws

Patient care comes first	A patient's health should always come first. Religious exemption laws allow hospitals, doctors, and nurses to determine a patient's care based on their religious beliefs, not based on what is best for the patient's health and circumstances; a provider's religious beliefs should never determine the care a patient receives.
Laws risk a woman's life/health	Religious exemption laws put women's lives and health in danger. Some hospitals have turned away women seeking abortion or information about abortion, even when the woman's life is in jeopardy... hospitals have refused to treat a woman whose miscarriage is threatening her life. These practices put religious beliefs over patients' needs and they can - and have - resulted in infertility, infection, and even death.
No taxpayer-funded refusals	Religious exemption laws allow hospitals receiving government funding to deny medical care because of religious beliefs. Hospitals that take taxpayer dollars should not be allowed to use religious beliefs as a reason to refuse to treat or serve a patient, including a woman seeking abortion.

- **Voters are willing to hold leaders accountable for their votes on religious exemption laws.** Thirty-eight percent of voters say they are more likely to support an elected official who opposes religious exemption laws, compared to 32 percent who would be less likely. Democrats (57 percent more likely to support), pro-choice voters (51 percent more likely to support), and liberals (68 percent more likely to support) show particular willingness to support opponents of religious exemption laws.
- **Strong support exists for proactive policies that ensure access to abortion.** Majorities of voters favor a range of forward-looking proposals that guarantee access to care. This includes ensuring hospitals, doctors, and nurses provide complete information and referrals to patients about medical services, including abortion—even if the hospital does not provide abortions. There is also strong support for measures that protect the rights of doctors and nurses to provide accurate information and advice to their patients without fear of retribution.

Figure 3: Strong Support for Proactive Policies to Protect Patient Care



Appendix A: Survey Questions

Q.1 Now, I am going to read you a statement about health insurance coverage for a range of women's health services. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with that statement.

All health insurance plans should cover all basic health services for women, including birth control, abortion, pre-natal care, childbirth, and post-partum care.

	Total
Strongly agree	50
Somewhat agree.....	14
Somewhat disagree	13
Strongly disagree	20
(Don't know/refused)	3
Total Agree	64
Total Disagree	33
Agree - Disagree	31

Q.2 As you may know, laws currently allow certain health care providers, like hospitals, doctors, nurses, clinics, and health insurance companies, to refuse to treat a woman seeking an abortion, birth control, or medical care for a miscarriage because of religious or moral beliefs. These laws are sometimes called "religious exemption" laws but you might have also heard them referred to as "conscience clauses."

From what you know, do you favor or oppose these religious exemption laws?

	Total
Strongly favor.....	22
Somewhat favor.....	18
Somewhat oppose	19
Strongly oppose	30
(Don't know/refused)	12
Total Favor	39
Total Oppose	49
Oppose - Favor.....	10

Q.3 Now, I want to ask you about a few specific consequences that may occur as a result of religious exemption laws. After each, please tell me whether you favor or oppose laws that allow that specific consequence.

	Strng	Smwt	Smwt	Strng	DK/	Total	Total	Oppose
	Favor	Favor	Oppose	Oppose	Ref	Favor	Oppose	-
a.. Insurance companies can refuse to cover a woman's abortion, birth control, or medical care for a miscarriage because of religious or moral beliefs.	13	9	14	58	5	23	73	50
b. Hospitals can refuse to provide a woman with information or referrals about abortion, birth control, or medical care for a miscarriage because of religious or moral beliefs.	14	11	17	54	5	25	71	46
c. Doctors or nurses can refuse to provide a woman with information or referrals about abortion, birth control, or medical care for a miscarriage because of religious or moral beliefs.	14	12	15	53	6	26	68	43
d. Hospitals can refuse to treat a woman seeking an abortion, birth control, or medical care for a miscarriage because of religious or moral beliefs.	15	13	16	52	4	28	67	39
e. Doctors or nurses can refuse to treat a woman seeking an abortion, birth control, or medical care for a miscarriage because of religious or moral beliefs.	19	14	15	47	5	33	62	28

Q.4 Now I am going to read you a few statements about religious exemption laws. After each one, please tell me whether you find it a very convincing reason to OPPOSE religious exemption laws, a somewhat convincing reason, a not very convincing reason or not at all convincing reason to OPPOSE religious exemption laws.

	Very Conv	Smwt Conv	A Little Conv	Not at All	DK/ Ref	Very/ Smwt Conv	Little/ Not Conv
a. A patient's health should always come first. Religious exemption laws allow hospitals, doctors, and nurses to determine a patient's care based on their religious beliefs, not based on what is best for the patient's health and circumstances. A health care provider's religious beliefs should never determine the care a patient receives.	43	21	16	17	3	64	33
b. Religious exemption laws put women's lives and health in danger. Because of religious beliefs, some hospitals have turned away women seeking abortion or information about abortion, even when the woman's life is in jeopardy. In some instances, hospitals have refused to treat a woman whose miscarriage is threatening her life. These practices put religious beliefs over patients' needs and they can - and have - resulted in infertility, infection, and even death.	39	23	14	20	3	62	34
c. Religious exemption laws allow hospitals receiving government funding to deny medical care because of religious beliefs. Hospitals that take taxpayer dollars should not be allowed to use religious beliefs as a reason to refuse to treat or serve a patient, including a woman seeking an abortion.	37	23	15	22	3	60	37

	Very Conv	Smwt Conv	A Little Conv	Not at All	DK/ Ref	Very/ Smwt Conv	Little/ Not Conv
d. One in six hospital beds in the US is in a Catholic-affiliated facility, which often refuse to treat a woman seeking an abortion. This means more and more hospitals are putting religious beliefs over a patient's health, and that a woman seeking an abortion might not have another option for healthcare. A health care provider's religious beliefs should never determine the care a patient receives, especially when she has no other options.	34	22	18	22	3	56	41
e. Cost and other barriers already stand in the way of too many women getting the health care they need. Religious exemption laws that allow a hospital, doctor, or nurse to refuse to treat a woman seeking an abortion add to the difficulties a woman already faces. These laws will result in a woman having to delay care or not receive the care she needs.	30	24	20	23	4	53	43
f. Religious exemption laws are just one more way for politicians to interfere with a woman's deeply personal decision to have an abortion. Since attempts to overturn legal abortion through the Supreme Court haven't been successful, politicians are working to restrict a woman's access to abortion through these laws.	30	21	20	24	5	51	44
g. Big insurance companies already have too much control over an individual's health care. Religious exemption laws give these companies a blank check to treat people differently and deny care to certain people. Insurance companies can claim objections to avoid having to cover the costs of abortion, putting a bigger financial burden on women seeking those services and pushing care out of reach.	27	26	20	24	4	53	44

Q.5 Now I am going to read you a few more statements about religious exemption laws. After each one, please tell me whether you find it a very convincing reason to SUPPORT religious exemption laws, a somewhat convincing reason, a not very convincing reason or not at all convincing reason to SUPPORT religious exemption laws, also known as conscience clauses.

	Very Conv	Smwt Conv	A Little Conv	Not at All	DK/ Ref	Very/ Smwt Conv	Little/ Not Conv
a. Conscience clauses protect religious freedom. Government mandates forcing doctors, nurses, hospitals, employers, or health insurers to provide abortions or pay for abortions discriminate against those with religious and moral beliefs against abortion. These laws are necessary to make sure health care providers are not forced to violate their conscience.	24	28	20	24	4	52	44
b. Conscience clauses do not prevent individuals from having access to any health care services they want, including birth control, abortion, or medical care for a miscarriage. If a hospital, doctor, or nurse does not offer the services someone wants, there are many other options a person can choose from. Individuals can choose what employer they work for, and if they do not like the health plan offered they can find an employer that offers a plan that fits their needs.	24	23	19	31	3	47	50
c. Some politicians want to force doctors, nurses, and hospitals to submit entirely to the will of the patient. Health care providers are being punished for being faithful to their conscience when they decline to provide services like abortions. A patient's need shouldn't trump a health care provider's religious or moral beliefs.	21	26	18	30	4	47	48

Q.6 Now that you have heard more information, I want to ask you again, do you favor or oppose religious exemption laws that allow certain health care providers, like hospitals, doctors, nurses, clinics, and health insurance companies, to refuse to treat a woman seeking an abortion, birth control, or medical care for a miscarriage because of religious or moral beliefs?

	Total
Strongly favor.....	21
Somewhat favor.....	13
Somewhat oppose	19
Strongly oppose.....	43
(Don't know/refused)	5
Total Favor	34
Total Oppose.....	61
Oppose - Favor.....	28

Q.7 Now thinking about everything you have heard about religious exemption laws, if your representative in the state legislature or Congress voted against a religious exemption law, would you be more likely to support him or her, less likely to support him or her, or would it not have much impact one way or the other?

	Total
Much more likely	23
Somewhat more likely	15
Somewhat less likely.....	11
Much less likely.....	21
No impact.....	27
(Don't know/refused)	3
Total More Likely.....	38
Total Less Likely	32
More - Less.....	6
(ref:IMPACT)	

Q.8 Now I am going to read you a few proposals that make sure hospitals, doctors, and nurses will treat a woman seeking an abortion. After each one, please tell me whether you favor or oppose this proposal.

	Strng	Smwt	Smwt	Strng	DK/	Total	Total	Favor
	Favor	Favor	Oppose	Oppose	Ref	Favor	Oppose	-
a. Make sure hospitals, doctors, and nurses provide patients with medical services including abortion when a patient's life or health is at risk.	60	22	8	8	2	82	16	66
b. Make sure that a hospital that does not provide abortion still provides a woman with correct and complete information and referrals for abortion so that a patient is not left with nowhere to turn.	58	22	8	9	3	80	17	63
c. Make sure all hospitals provide a patient with the right care for her situation, including abortion.....	48	18	10	21	2	66	31	35
d. Stop hospitals from firing, demoting, or otherwise retaliating against doctors or nurses because they treated a woman seeking an abortion or gave her information or referrals for abortion.	46	14	14	22	4	60	36	24
e. Stop hospitals from telling doctors or nurses that they cannot give a patient information or referrals for abortion.	39	17	15	24	4	57	40	17