



## Michigan National Organization for Women

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June 13, 2012

Honorable Jim Marleau, Chair  
Senate Health Policy Committee  
1010 Farnum Building  
Lansing, Michigan

Dear Senator Marleau and Members of Senate Health Policy Committee:

The Michigan National Organization for Women **opposes SB 975**, a bill which would allow health care insurers, facilities, and providers to deny health care services to patients based on religious objections to the services by the insurer, facility or provider. The bill is a religious favoritism bill and violative of the most basic religious freedom doctrines on which this country was founded by European colonists. It is a shocking bill in light of what we know about where religious intolerance leads.

These bills ensconce into law religious bigotry, intolerance, and discrimination on the basis of religious belief against patients of Michigan's health care system. The religious beliefs of insurers, facilities, and providers should not be allowed have ascendancy over the religious views and health care needs of patients. The bill's major flaw is that it is not even-handed in protecting religious liberty.

The right of religious conscience is fundamental in our American legal system. Any law protecting the right of conscience must be even-handed and protect all sides, not permit one religious view to predominate. SB 975 as drafted only protects insurers, facilities, and providers that want to refuse to give medical care. It provides no protection to the consciences of insurers, facilities, or providers who want to provide services, or to patients who want to receive them.

SB 975's apparent intent is to reduce the number of insurers, facilities, and providers who provide comprehensive reproductive health care, or health care services to homosexuals based on the religious tenets of the Catholic Bishops. According to the Guttmacher Institute, one of three women will have an abortion in her lifetime. Ninety-nine percent of American women have used birth control. Catholics themselves reflect these same percentages. The bill provides no religious liberty protection to these women and homosexuals but instead permits and promotes denial of services to them.

*NOW's purpose is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men.*

Some examples of what SB 975 would permit:

- an insurer or employer could refuse to cover pregnancy costs associated with an out-of-wedlock pregnancy
- an insurance company could refuse all coverage for gays or lesbians based on the religious objection of the insurance company
- a doctor could refuse to provide services to a woman, a minority, or an HIV-positive person
- a hospital could block doctors from treating miscarriages and late ectopic pregnancies. Women who need a life-saving abortion could quite literally be left to die, all in the name of “conscience.”

Michigan NOW urges that the bill be amended to also protect the religious beliefs of all who come into contact with Michigan’s health care system, including the conscience of patients needing or wanting treatment.

We especially believe that any insurer, facility or provider receiving state or federal funds such as Medicaid or Medicare should be required to provide comprehensive medical services.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on some of our objections to SB 975.

/s/

Mary Pollock  
Legislative Vice President  
Michigan NOW