



HB 232 relative to the rights of conscience for medical professionals.
Committee House Judiciary Committee
Date February 5, 2025
Position Oppose

Freedom of religion is important; it's one of our nation's fundamental values. That's why it's already protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution. Planned Parenthood opposes discrimination in all forms. However, religious freedom does not include the right to harm others. The rights of any health care provider to exert his or her conscience must be balanced against the right of a patient to receive care without delay or harm and the right of a health care facility to provide high-quality medical care to all patients, regardless of their sex, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, or health care needs.

In the case of HB 232, there is no balance. Denials of care are allowed without any liability and without any protection for patients. Patients across the state, especially those in rural areas, could be denied health care and timely prescriptions. **This bill could lead to delayed or substandard medical care throughout New Hampshire.** Therefore, this bill infringes upon the duty of institutions to provide quality health care to patients and could **result in harm or even potentially death for women who are denied critical health care services in life-threatening and time-sensitive situations.**

The bill would allow nearly any employee at any public or private health care institution, including pharmacies, to not only refuse to provide abortion, sterilization, or contraception, but also to refuse to fill prescriptions, refuse to make referrals, or refuse to even admit a patient for any of those services.

HB 232 is not just limited to employees with religious beliefs—anyone with a “moral or ethical objection” to these services may restrict access for the patient, **undermining the patient's right to health care.** Under this bill, a woman with an appointment may not even be able to see her doctor if the receptionist refuses to process her paperwork, and a pharmacist can refuse to fill a prescription for birth control based on their own, personal beliefs. **HB 232 specifically allows health care providers or other hospital employees to not only refuse to provide care, but to also refuse to provide a referral to another hospital or provider for care.**

HB 232 does not include an exception for a medical emergency. Even in a medical emergency during which withholding care could result in the death of a patient, HB 232 would allow providers to deny essential, life-saving medical care to patients based on a religious or “moral” objection and shield the provider from any actions – however reasonable – from their employer. This could leave patients in a life-threatening emergency in need of abortion or sterilization services without any access to critical medical care.

Anyone with a religious, moral, or ethical objection to abortion, sterilization, or contraception services may restrict the health care that a patient may receive, undermining the patient’s right to health care. The boundaries for moral or ethical objections are not defined in the bill, resulting in limitless possibilities for providers who refuse to give essential care. A patient in the hospital may not be able to ask a provider about birth control if a medical aide refuses to call a nurse or physician based on a “moral objection,” and a pharmacist can refuse to fill a prescription for birth control—regardless of whether it is prescribed for contraception or for other medical reasons, such as polycystic ovary syndrome. The bill goes even further by allowing those who admit or refer patients to discriminate based on their personal beliefs, meaning that patients could be affected at any point during a visit to obtain health care.

This bill allows discrimination against individuals based on the personal beliefs of a health care provider. People have the right to be able to trust that health care providers will provide the best care possible, not worry that they may instead impose their private, religious beliefs on their patients. This bill would allow a physician to deny a woman a prescription for contraception because she is unmarried. Additionally, the broad nature of this bill would allow a pharmacist or any employee at a pharmacy to deny an individual access to contraception, including emergency contraception – which must be taken within a relatively short window of time to be effective to prevent a pregnancy – or even condoms. In rural areas of the state, where there are fewer locations to access contraception, an employee who objects to the use of contraception could cause significant harm or delays to individuals.

This bill makes it impossible for providers to protect patient health and accommodate religious refusals. This bill doesn’t require advance notice of an employee’s beliefs or desire to refuse to provide care, which can leave patients without care in emergency situations. Even if notice was provided, HB 232 would prevent an employer from making changes to their staffing, even if the change was a valid attempt at accommodation. According to this bill, if the employer takes any recourse against a provider who refuses to provide care, even in a medical emergency resulting in severe injury or death, and the provider then sues their employer, the employer cannot use as a defense that there was a burden, including potential death, to a patient.

This bill may be presented as a way to protect religious liberty, but religious freedom is already protected for health care providers. The intent of this bill is to further stigmatize and make it harder for patients to access abortion and other reproductive health care services.

HB 232 would significantly and negatively affect health care services in rural areas and hospitals, increase barriers to contraception, and further stigmatize abortion care.

We urge the House Judiciary Committee to vote Inexpedient to Legislate on HB 232.

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Planned Parenthood New Hampshire Action Fund (PPNHAF) is an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization formed as the advocacy and political arm of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England in New Hampshire. The Action Fund engages in educational and electoral activity, including voter education, grassroots organizing, and legislative advocacy.

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England (PPNNE) is the largest provider of reproductive and sexual health care across the State of New Hampshire. We serve New Hampshire residents through 5 health centers in Derry, Exeter, Keene, Manchester and White River Junction, VT. Last fiscal year we saw more than 11,000 patients at these sites. [PPNNE was named a 2021 Guardian of Excellence Award winner](#) by [Press Ganey](#), the national leader in health care consumer and workforce engagement. Press Ganey recognizes PPNNE as a top-performing health care organization, achieving the 95- percentile or above for performance in patient experience.