
IN THE
Supreme Court of Iowa

No. 23-1145

PLANNED PARENTHOOD OF THE HEARTLAND, INC., EMMA
GOLDMAN CLINIC, and SARAH TRAXLER, M.D.,

Petitioners-Appellees,

vs.

KIM REYNOLDS ex rel. STATE OF IOWA, and IOWA BOARD OF
MEDICINE,

Respondents-Appellants.

**On Appeal from the Iowa District Court for Polk County
The Honorable Joseph Seidlin
Case Nos. EQCE089066**

**BRIEF OF *AMICUS CURIAE* INTERFAITH ALLIANCE OF IOWA
IN SUPPORT OF *PETITIONERS-APPELLEES***

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IDENTITY AND INTEREST OF AMICUS CURIAE¹

Interfaith Alliance of Iowa (“Interfaith Alliance”) is a voice for people of faith and no faith interested in protecting religious freedom, ensuring religion is not misused to discriminate, championing individual rights, and uniting diverse voices to challenge extremism. Interfaith Alliance educates and advocates on many issues of fairness and justice, and always leads with civility.

Interfaith Alliance includes individuals in communities across Iowa who are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Unitarian Universalists, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, agnostics, and more. Interfaith Alliance’s diverse background provides an important perspective to the issues raised in this case. For many of the individuals affiliated with Interfaith Alliance, their faith, religion, and moral views support the importance of treating all people with dignity and respecting the rights of the individual to make their own private medical decisions with the guidance of their doctors and spiritual or faith leaders, if important to the individual. Interfaith Alliance is particularly interested in this case to ensure the Iowa Supreme Court is presented with the diversity of belief and thought amongst persons of faith, or no faith at all, on the issue of abortion, including when life begins.

¹ Consent of all parties to the filing of this brief attached at Attachment 4.

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP OF BRIEF AND FUNDING

This brief was authored by legal counsel for Interfaith Alliance of Iowa. Legal counsel for the parties, and the parties themselves, have not contributed monetary funds to the preparation of this brief and have not authored the brief in whole or in part. No third parties contributed any funds to the preparation or submission of this brief.

INTRODUCTION

There is no single, uniform position among Iowans of faith as to the morality and permissibility of abortion. Opinions on when life begins, what life is, what role the government should or should not have in life, and the rights of the mother differ greatly not only between different faiths, but also within different sects of the same faith. These differences of opinion are also shared by Iowans with no faith at all. These differences must be respected, and a single religious view on these issues cannot be allowed to dictate public policy.

ARGUMENT

I. Religious Faiths and Traditions Across Iowa Do Not Share a Uniform View of When Life Begins.

There is a diversity of views within and across religious traditions and faiths on when a human life begins, including people of faith and people of no faith, across the state of Iowa. *See generally* Br. of Amici Curiae Kentucky Religious Coal. for Reproductive Choice, et al., *Cameron v. EMW Women’s Surgical Ctr.*, P.S.C., Case No. 2022-SC-0329-TG, Commonwealth of Kentucky Supreme Court, Oct. 4, 2022.

The United Church of Christ recognized this when it stated that “there are many religious and theological perspectives on when life and personhood begin,” and “public policy must honor this rich religious diversity.” *See* United Church of

Christ, *Statement on Reproductive Health and Justice*,

https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/455/reproductive-health-and-justice.pdf.

While Christianity is the predominant religious faith of Iowans, not all sects of Christians uniformly share the view that life begins at conception. For example, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the United Church of Christ have all noted the diverse range of religious views on this question in declining to take a position on when human life begins. *See* Pew Research Ctr., *Religious Landscape Study, Religious Composition of Adults in Iowa*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/state/iowa/>; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Abortion/Reproductive Choice Issues*, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/social-issues/abortion-issues/>; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Social Statement on Abortion*, at 1, 3 n.2 (1991), <https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/AbortionSS.pdf>; United Church of Christ, *Statement on Reproductive Health and Justice*, https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/455/reproductive-health-and-justice.pdf.

“With respect to the right to choose, [women are] supported in making decisions pertaining to [their] own body, whatever the issue might be, including abortion. The freedom to make those choices is clearly a part of the free exercise of religious/spiritual practice within Unity teachings.” Decl. of Rev. Deborah Hill-Davis, attached as Att. 1 and incorporated as if fully set forth verbatim herein. Catholic teachings on this question have also varied dramatically. *See* Vatican Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Procured Abortion*, at n. 19 (Nov. 18, 1974), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19741118_declaration-abortion_en.html. At various points in time, Catholic scholars and the Catholic Church have espoused different views on when life begins. One view is that “ensoulment” occurs at 40 to 80 days after conception. *See* Anne Stensvold, *A History of Pregnancy in Christianity: From Original Sin to Contemporary Abortion Debates* 45046 (2015) (hereinafter “Stensvold, *A History of Pregnancy in Christianity*”). An alternative viewpoint has been that life begins at the time of quickening, *i.e.*, when the fetus first moves inside the womb, usually around 18 weeks of gestation, as measured from the first day of the last menstrual period. *Id.* at 70; Frank K. Flinn, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* 4-5 (2007); Elissa Strauss, *When Does Life Begin? It’s Not so Simple*, *Slate* (Apr. 4, 2017),

<https://slate.com/human-interest/2017/04/when-does-life-begin-outside-the-christian-right-the-answer-is-over-time.html> (hereinafter “Strauss, *When Does Life Begin?*”).

At another point in time, the Catholic Church held the view that life begins at or near the time of childbirth, or at some moment during fetal development that is impossible to pinpoint. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2.88-89; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.118; see also Garry Wills, *Abortion Isn't a Religious Issue*, L.A. Times (Nov. 4, 2007), <https://www.latimes.com/la-op-wills4nov04-story.html>; Strauss, *When Does Life Begin?* (“The Catholic Church has never dogmatically defined when life begins,” but rather, “there is a recognition that there is unfolding developmental potential in embryo, from unification between sperm and egg to birth. There is no defined moment of ensoulment.” (citations omitted)).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the “LDS Church”) also has never taken an official position on when a fetus becomes a person. Peggy Fletcher-Stack, *Surprise! The LDS Church can be seen as more ‘pro-choice’ than ‘pro-life’ on abortion. Here’s why*, SALT LAKE TRIB. (June 1, 2019), <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/06/01/surprise-lds-church-can/>; see also Park Ridge Ctr., *The Latter Day Saints Tradition: Religious Beliefs and Healthcare*

Decisions at 10 (Deborah Abbott ed., 2002), https://www.advocatehealth.com/assets/documents/faith/latter-day_saints_tradition.pdf.

In the Jewish tradition, the creation of a human life is generally viewed as something that happens gradually over time. *See* Strauss, *When Does Life Begin?* Jewish “tradition holds that we enter life in stages and leave in stages.” *See id.* (quoting Rabbi Elliot Dorff, bioethicist and professor of Jewish theology at the American Jewish University in California); *see also* Nat’l Council of Jewish Women, *Abortion and Jewish Values Toolkit* at 16 (2020), https://www.ncjw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NCJW_ReproductiveGuide_Final.pdf (hereinafter, “NCJW, *Abortion and Jewish Values*”).

The Talmud, the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law and Jewish theology, teaches that the fetus is “mere fluid” up to the point of 40 days of gestation and “[f]ollowing this period, the fetus is considered a physical part of the pregnant individual’s body, not yet having a life of its own or independent rights.” NCJW, *Abortion and Jewish Values* at 16; *see also* Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, *The Torah of Reproductive Justice*, <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/234926.8?lang=bi> (hereinafter “*Torah of Reproductive Justice*”). (Note, this is understood as 40 days from *conception*, or approximately 7-8 weeks of gestation.) It is not until the moment of birth when the

head has emerged and the baby has breathed outside air that it is considered a living being. See Mishnah Ohalot 7:6; see also NCJW, *Abortion and Jewish Values* at 16; Strauss, *When Does Life Begin?; Torah of Reproductive Justice* (quoting Rashi on Sanhedrin 72b:14). “Jewish tradition considers neither an embryo nor a fetus a living person; rather, it is part of the mother’s body. This belief has lasted from ancient scriptural times until today.” Decl. of Rabbi Linda Bertenthal, attached as Att. 2 and incorporated as if fully set forth verbatim herein.

Other faiths similarly vary in their views of when life begins. For example, “[a]mong Muslims, there is no universally agreed-upon moment when a fetus becomes a person.” Strauss, *When Does Life Begin?* The predominant Islamic view is that a fetus acquires personhood 120 days from conception, *i.e.*, at approximately 19-20 weeks of gestation. Mark Cherry, *Religious Perspectives on Bioethics* 196-97 (2004); Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islamic Biomedical Ethics: Principles and Applications* 134-35, 140-41 (2009); Dariusch Atighetchi, *Islamic Bioethics: Problems and Perspectives* 94 (2006); see also Strauss, *When Does Life Begin?*

Indeed, the diversity of thought among those of faith, or no faith, is so broad that limits to abortion medical care are now being challenged as unconstitutional, as such limits violate the constitutionally protected religious

freedoms of those with different opinions. *See* Pet. for Inj. and Declaratory Relief, *The Rev. Traci Blackmon, et al. v. State of Missouri, et al.*, Case No. 2322-CC00120, State of Missouri Circuit Court for St. Louis City (“The people of Missouri have the absolute right to live free from the religious dictates of others. The Missouri Constitution protects that right by ensuring a strict separation of church and state.”).

II. Diverse Religious Traditions Affirm Individuals’ Moral Right to Decide Whether and Under What Circumstances to Terminate a Pregnancy.

A broad, diverse range of religious traditions recognize the moral right of the individual to make their own private decisions about pregnancy in accordance with their conscience and faith.

Numerous Protestant denominations expressly affirm that every pregnant person is a moral agent with both the capacity and the ultimate right to determine whether an abortion is justified. For instance, the United Church of Christ embraces the view that “[e]very woman must have the freedom of choice to follow her personal religious and moral convictions concerning the completion or termination of her pregnancy.” Thirteen General Synod of the United Church of Christ, *Resolution on Freedom of Choice*, 81-GS-60, 10 (1981) <https://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/GS-Resolutions-Freedom-of-Choice.pdf>. Similarly,

the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) asserts that “[h]umans are empowered by the spirit prayerfully to make significant moral choices, including the choice to continue or end a pregnancy.” Minutes of the 217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at 905 (2006). The Episcopal Church of America has adopted the position that the “decision to terminate a pregnancy . . . properly belongs to the couple, in consultation with their physician and the Church.” Episcopal Church, *Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health*, Resolution #A087 at 153 (1988), available at https://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/gc_reports/reports/1988/bb_1988-R016.pdf. “The Episcopal Church is unequivocally opposed to any government legislation which would abridge or deny the right of individuals to reach informed decisions about the termination of pregnancy or that would limit the access of a woman to safe means of acting on her decision.” Decl. of Bishop Betsey Monnot, attached as Att. 3 and incorporated as if fully set forth verbatim herein.

The Episcopal Church of America recognizes “the moral option for termination of [a] pregnancy in specific instances” and expresses a “deep conviction” that any legislation surrounding abortion “must take special care to see that individual conscience is respected,” and must not “abridge[] the right of a woman to reach an informed decision about the termination of pregnancy” or limit

her access “to safe means of acting on her decision.” Episcopal Church, *Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health* at 153. Other Protestant denominations espouse similar views. See Thirteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ, *Resolution on Freedom of Choice*; Freedom of Choice Act of 1989: Hearing on S. 1912 Before the S. Comm. on Labor and Human Resources, 101st Cong. 237.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has resolved that “the place of decision making on abortion [is] not with public legislators, but with the individuals involved with the pregnancy . . . on the basis of ethical and moral grounds.” Freedom of Choice Act of 1989: Hearing on S. 1912 Before the S. Comm. on Labor and Human Resources, 101st Cong. 237 (1990) (Testimony of John O. Humbert, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the USA and Canada) (citing General Assembly Resolutions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Resolution 8954 (1989) and 7524 (1975)).

The Unitarian Universalist Association asserts that “the personal right to choose in regard to contraception and abortion” is an important aspect of the “right to individual conscience” and the “inherent worth and dignity of every person.” Unitarian Universalist Ass’n, *General Resolution on the Right to Choose* (1987), <https://www.uua.org/action/statements/right-choose>. Many other denominations

embrace similar views. *See, e.g.,* Am. Baptist Ass’n, *Resolution Concerning Abortion and Ministry in the Local Church* (1987), <https://www.abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Abortion-and-Ministry-in-the-Local-Church.pdf>; Br. of *Amici Curiae* Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, et al., in Support of Respondent, *Stenberg v. Carhart*, No. 99-380 (Mar. 29, 2000) (describing views of American Friends Service Committee affirming “a woman’s right to follow her own conscience concerning child-bearing, abortion, and sterilization”); Metro. Cmty. Churches, *Statement of Faith on Women’s Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice* (Mar. 20, 2013), <https://www.mccchurch.org/statement-of-faith-on-womens-reproductive-health-rights-and-justice/> [<https://perma.cc/5H9L-CT7P>] (affirming “that all people are entitled to the rights and resources that equip them to make their own decisions about their bodies . . . and their well-being, including the inalienable right of women to control their bodies”).

In addition, a number of Protestant denominations teach that the decision to terminate a pregnancy can be a morally permissible choice consistent with Christian ethics, and that the law should not preclude a pregnant person from making the ultimate determination to obtain an abortion in accordance with their faith. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms that “[t]he considered decision of a woman to terminate a pregnancy can be morally acceptable,” and “therefore should

not be restricted by law.” Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Abortion/Reproductive Choice Issues*. “The individual person is responsible and accountable to themselves and to their God, as they understand God. This is the true freedom of religion as Unity understands it.” Decl. of Reverend Deborah Hill-Davis, attached as Att. 1 and incorporated as if fully set forth verbatim herein.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirms that “there can be sound reasons for ending a pregnancy through induced abortion,” and that there are situations where obtaining an abortion may be a “morally responsible” choice. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Social Statement on Abortion*, at 6-7.

The General Board of American Baptist Churches recognizes that many American Baptists believe that abortion “can be a morally acceptable action,” and “advocate for and support . . . legalized abortion as in the best interest of women in particular and society in general.” Am. Baptist Ass’n, *Resolution Concerning Abortion and Ministry in the Local Church* at 1; see also Alliance of Baptists, *A Statement on Lifelong Sexual Education, Sexual & Reproductive Rights, and Oppressing Sexual Justice and Violence* (2012), <https://allianceofbaptists.org/assets/uploads/congregations/LifelongSexualEducation2012.pdf>.

There are also diverse views within the Catholic Church on the moral propriety of obtaining an abortion. While the official stance of the Catholic Church

is that abortion is impermissible, the majority of American Catholics believe that abortion can be a morally acceptable choice. Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html; Belden Russonello Strategists, *2016 Survey of Catholic Likely Voters*, at 5 (Oct. 2016), <https://rifuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2016-Catholic-Voter-Poll.pdf>. The beliefs even go so far as to find abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Dalia Fahmy, *8 Key Findings about Catholics and Abortion*, Pew Research Ctr. (Oct. 20, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/08/29/u-s-public-continues-to-favor-legal-abortion-oppose-overturning-roe-v-wade/>.

Traditional Jewish teachings view abortion as permissible and are even required when necessary to safeguard the well-being of the pregnant person. *See* Strauss, *When Does Life Begin?*; NCJW, *Abortion and Jewish Values* at 16; *Torah of Reproductive Justice* (Rashi on Sanhedrin 72b:14). “Jewish health care providers have a sacred duty to put the life and health of the pregnant person first.” Decl. of Rabbi Linda Bertenthal, attached as Att. 2 and incorporated as if fully set forth verbatim herein. Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Judaism all adopt the view that “women are capable of making moral decisions, often in

consultation with their clergy, families, and physicians, on whether or not to have an abortion.” 14 Cong. Rec. S10491 (daily ed. Sept. 17, 1998) (quoting Letter of 729 Rabbis in Support of President Clinton’s Veto of H.R. 1122 (Sept. 10, 1998)); *see also* Religious Action Ctr. Of Reform Judaism, *Reproductive and Health Rights*, <https://rac.org/issues/reproductive-health-and-rights> (“The Reform Movement’s positions on reproductive rights are grounded in the core belief that each person should have agency and autonomy over their own bodies.”).

Moreover, hundreds of Jewish leaders have reaffirmed the importance of ensuring access to reproductive healthcare, including abortion, as an essential matter of religious freedom. Letter of Jewish Clergy Leaders to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, dated July 16, 2021, https://www.ncjw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/06-16-2021_Jewish-Clergy-Leaders-WHPA-Letter-FINAL-1.pdf.

Other major religions likewise teach that abortion is both permissible and moral under certain circumstances and affirm that it is an individual’s decision whether terminating a pregnancy is consistent with their faith and values. *See, e.g.*, Mohammad A. Albar, *Induced Abortion From An Islamic Perspective: Is It Criminal Or Just Elective*, 8 J. FAM. CMTY. MED. 25, 29-32 (2001); Strauss, *When Does Life Begin?*; Buddhist Churches of America Social Issues Committee, *A Shin*

Buddhist Stance on Abortion at 6, Buddhist Peace Fellowship Newsletter 6 (1984); *Hindus in America Speak Out On Abortion Issues*, Hinduism Today (Sept. 1985), <https://www.hinduismtoday.com/magazine/september-1985/1985-09-hindus-in-america-speak-put-on-abortion-issues/>. And majorities of Buddhists and Hindus in the United States believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Pew Research Ctr., *2014 Religious Landscape Study* at 110, 197, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/about-the-religious-landscape-study/>.

III. Diverse Religious Traditions Affirm the Importance of Ensuring Reproductive Choice for Pregnant Persons in Marginalized Communities.

Many religious traditions embrace the importance of serving and supporting vulnerable and marginalized communities. “In the case of human beings capable of becoming pregnant, the Episcopal Church maintains that access to equitable health care, including reproductive care and procedures, is an integral part of a woman’s struggle to assert her dignity and worth as a human being.” Decl. of Bishop Betsey Monnot, attached as Att. 3 and incorporated as if fully set forth verbatim herein.

Many of these traditions teach that people of faith have a moral obligation to protect, succor, uplift, and advocate on behalf of the poor and low-income persons and those who have historically been disenfranchised or have been victims of discrimination. Numerous religions expressly affirm that this charge includes

ensuring that individuals from these communities have access to healthcare, including abortion, and the freedom to make decisions concerning their reproductive health.

For example, the United Church of Christ has adopted resolutions supporting measures to ensure that “women with limited financial means” are able to “exercise [their] legal right to the full range of reproductive health services.” United Church of Christ, *Statement on Reproductive Health and Justice*. Similarly, the Unitarian Universalist Association has affirmed the importance of supporting “everyone’s freedom of reproductive choice . . . especially the most vulnerable and marginalized,” and has condemned attempts “to restrict access to birth control and abortion by overriding individual decisions of conscience” which “often result in depriving poor women of their right to medical care.” Unitarian Universalist Ass’n, *Reproductive Justice 2015 Statement of Conscience*, <https://www.uua.org/action/statements/reproductive-justice>; Unitarian Universalist Ass’n, *General Resolution on the Right to Choose* (1987).

In addition, some Catholics believe that protecting the rights of poor and vulnerable individuals to end their pregnancies is a natural and necessary outgrowth of care principles of Catholic social justice. Catholics for Choice, *Social Justice*, <https://www.catholicsforchoice.org/issues/social-justice/> (“Catholic social

justice doctrine teaches that caring for the poor and marginalized should be our first priority. Ideological battles about abortion and contraception access always inflict disproportionate harm on the economically disadvantaged, the powerless, and people of color.”). Many believers from the Jewish tradition expressly link the Jewish teaching of *tzedek tzedek tirdof* – i.e., to pursue justice for all – to the obligation to advocate for the reproductive rights of *all* persons as a matter integral to religious liberty, so that individuals may make their own moral or faith-based decisions about their bodies, health, families, and futures. *See* NCJW, *Abortion and Jewish Values* at 13-14.

As demonstrated, understanding and respecting the diversity of thought on life and abortion throughout various faiths recognizes that there is not a single uniform position on the issue, but also acknowledges that advocating for access to healthcare, including abortions, derives from core principles of one’s faith.

CONCLUSION

There are diverse and wide-ranging opinions on human life, when it starts, how it may be terminated, and the government’s role in those decisions. These differences exist among the faithful and those without faith. While some may believe that abortion is against their religious teachings and they have a moral obligation to advocate against it, others believe the exact opposite—that their

belief system supports one's right to make highly personal medical decisions, such as abortions, and they must advocate for those rights. It is important this Court recognize this diversity.

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I hereby certify that on January 15, 2024, I electronically filed the foregoing document with the Clerk of the Supreme Court by using the Iowa Judicial Branch electronic filing system which will send a notice of electronic filing to the following:

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ATTACHMENTS

1. Declaration of Reverend Deborah Hill-Davis
2. Declaration of Rabbi Linda Bertenthal
3. Declaration of Bishop Betsey Monnot
4. Consent of all parties to filing of amicus curiae brief.