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PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

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July 13, 2022

The Honorable Jerry Nadler, Chair  
The Honorable Jim Jordan, Ranking Member  
Judiciary Committee, U.S. House of Representatives  
2141 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
*Submitted via email: [william.emmons@mail.house.gov](mailto:william.emmons@mail.house.gov)*

## **RE: House Judiciary Committee Hearing, “What’s Next: The Threat to Individual Freedoms in a Post Roe World”**

Dear Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Jordan, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

With great concern for our nation and our fundamental freedoms, I offer the following statement ahead of the Committee’s upcoming hearing entitled “What’s Next: The Threat to Individual Freedoms in a Post Roe World.” My name is Rev. Dr. Katharine Rhodes Henderson, interim president and CEO of Interfaith Alliance Foundation, a national nonpartisan organization that champions an inclusive vision of religious freedom, promotes policies that protect the integrity of both religion and democracy, and works to ensure that all Americans are treated equally under the law.

Last month, the Supreme Court left us reeling from a decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* that unleashed untold pain upon individuals and families across the country. As a Christian minister, I draw strength from the courageous friends and partners who continue to care for, march beside, and demand justice for our communities. And as a woman who wrestled with and exercised my freedom of conscience and moral choice to have an abortion, my heart grieves the loss of a right not only protected by the Constitution but the ability for each person to live into our God-given capacity for self-determination.

Decisions about whether and when to become a parent are intensely personal and people of many faiths and none access abortion care every year. Various religious traditions approach these matters differently and these beliefs may – or may not – inform a patient’s decision to end a pregnancy. The freedom to believe as we choose, and to exercise those beliefs without fear of criminalization, is a basic matter of religious freedom.

Yet the First Amendment does not simply protect the right to free exercise, but simultaneously guarantees that the government will not establish an official religion or favor religion over non-religion. We rely on policymakers to enact laws consistent with these fundamental dictates, rooted in our rich but imperfect history, and we count on judges to strike down laws that violate these principles. Our democratic tradition recognizes the harms of legislating based on an individual or group’s religious convictions. But this will soon become the reality for millions of pregnant people living in states where lawmakers impose their own views on abortion upon their constituents, whether they share those beliefs or not.



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This committee will no doubt receive thoughtful and incisive testimony regarding the impact of the *Dobbs* decision on a myriad of individual freedoms. I respectfully urge you to include in this endeavor the devastating blow to religious freedom experienced by the overwhelming majority of people of faith who support access to abortion care. Every pregnant person should be able to make decisions about their body and family as I was able to do, yet many have already or will soon lose the right to do so.

When I am brought low – in times of lament like this – these words from a Christian text come to mind, and I offer them to you now: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, and of love, and of sound mind.” This is my hope for our nation, that those who hold power may choose to act with love for our most basic freedoms and restore our right to self-determination anew.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Katharine Rhodes Henderson  
Interim President and CEO  
Interfaith Alliance Foundation