

Letters: Defending the moral objection bill

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The premise of the Free Press editorial opposing Senate Bill 136 indicates a position was developed prior to having analyzed the legislation. What a disservice to those who value religious liberty and conscience rights as bedrock constitutional principles. To assert that any class of persons would be denied care under the bill appears to be an effort to promote ideological partisanship over sound public policy.

Since the 1970s, numerous presidents and Congresses of both parties have supported and signed legislation that protects conscience rights in health care

Civil rights policies upholding these laws have long been supported and defended in federal statute. Illinois has protected conscience rights in health care for more than a decade without compromising patient care or employer needs. Kentucky recently passed much broader protections with broad bipartisan support. Unfortunately, Michigan law has yet to solidify similar protections.

SB 136 allows for an employer to craft an employee accommodation policy in advance of any nonemergency, elective procedure or service that an employee may find objectionable, such as distributing abortion-inducing drugs or services that impact end-of-life care.

It is important to note that the bill further protects patients by strengthening laws already in place. Federal law stipulates that any health care entity that enters into a provider agreement with the government, which is virtually every hospital in the country, is prohibited from denying emergency care to anyone. The proposed legislation would strengthen those protections.

Contrary to the paper's position, SB 136 specifically prohibits discrimination. The protections afforded to a health provider

, according to the bill, do not apply if "the request is based on the patient or the patient's insurance coverage, ability to pay, or method of payment." As such, the bill protects patients, and health care workers, from discrimination.

Religious liberty, patient rights and employer needs are not mutually exclusive from one another. This balance will help to retain and recruit talented health care professionals

who live their daily lives in concert with their religious principles.

Conscience rights in health care deserve, and should find, protection in Michigan.

Tom Hickson