



**Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee on May 3, 2016
In support of House Bill 4787 and House Bill 4830
Coercive Abortion Prevention Legislation**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am Rebecca Mastee with the Michigan Catholic Conference. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, again, in favor of these important safeguards for women, designed to help prevent coerced abortion.

This committee has passed similar legislation during the last two legislative sessions. I again encourage your support for House Bills 4787 and 4830, to finally allow full implementation of existing law, which has the intent of protecting women against unwanted or forced abortions.

Coercive abortion is a very real and serious women's health issue. Some studies have revealed that up to 64% of American women report feeling pressured to abort – indicating more than half of abortions involve some form of coercion. From what I have heard directly from post-abortive women and what I have learned from the Catholic Church's Project Rachel program, which offers help and support to post-abortive women, I am inclined to agree with the 64% number.

While this number has been disputed in other testimony today, even the journal *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, a project of the pro-choice Guttmacher Institute, has recognized coercion impacting some women's decisions to have an abortion, albeit in a smaller percentage. Their survey of abortion patients (of which only 58% of patients completed the survey) outright indicated that 14% of women reported that their "husband or partner wants me to have an abortion" as a reason contributing to their abortion. Another 6% indicated that their parents wanted them to have an abortion. The authors of the survey also noted that the women often acknowledged complexity in their decision. With this in mind, we do not have further details on the situations of the 38% of women who reported they had an abortion because having a baby would interfere with their job/employment/career, or the 19% who reported they had an abortion because otherwise they would have had to find a new place to live. Another 48% reported that they were having an abortion because they were having relationship problems, including some whose partners said that they did not want a child. In these categories, could some of the women have also been experiencing coercion, possibly threats of loss of employment or housing, if they did not have an abortion? The same study interestingly mentions that during interviews of the women, in general "the language women used suggests that abortion was not something they desired." Let me repeat: "the language women used suggests that abortion was not something they desired."

Coercion to abort is a real problem. It is a violation of women's rights, it negatively impacts the physical and emotional health of women, violates freedom of conscience and one's right to freely choose to continue a pregnancy and give birth. These bills will help empower women with the knowledge that one cannot be pressured or threatened into having abortion against her will, and also provide penalties for those who try to exert control or power over a woman's desire to be a mother.

On behalf of the Michigan Catholic Conference, I encourage your support.