

HB1364

Favorable

Dr. Frank Arlinghaus

3010 Evergreen Way, Ellicott City MD 21042

I ask the members of the committee to return a favorable report on House Bill 1364.

This bill provides important protections for the conscience rights of health workers and hospitals. Maryland has a tradition of protecting the conscience rights of people, partnering with people of many faiths to provide a safe haven for them. However, conscience rights have come under attack recently, and it has become acceptable to target people of faith for having ethical issues with abortion or with some other thorny moral issue.

This problem affects more than a small subset of people of some specific religion. It not only cuts across faiths, it cuts across society as a whole. Fewer Marylanders go to church or identify with a specific faith, but still have a moral and ethical grounding to their lives that prohibits them from assisting in an abortion or in a number of other activities that violate their conscience.

As a scientist, I could not cooperate in such an activity. Whether I had a religious faith or not, the science of genetics tells me that at conception, a unique human life is created. In the womb, there are various developmental markers (just as there are outside the womb). There are circumstances that would mitigate my objections, primarily involving saving a life. These ethical problems exist for many of us, including my daughter, an emergency department nurse at a large hospital in Maryland.

We currently have an increasing shortage of nurses in Maryland, and see shortages across the health care sector. This bill would protect the conscience rights of those workers; not implementing these protections makes Maryland a more hostile environment to work in, and gives workers a reason to look outside Maryland for employment.

Similar arguments can be made for hospitals. Not protecting the ethical boundaries that are a part of a hospital's founding principles is making a statement that we might be willing to do without that hospital. The need for protection is evident given the attack on those principles in HB0050.

Given the crisis in healthcare today, we need to stand up for our workers. We need to protect them. We need to have their back.

I ask that you return a favorable report on House Bill 1364 for the reasons outlined above.