



North Carolina Jewish Clergy Association Stands in Opposition to Senate Bill 20

The North Carolina Jewish Clergy Association (NCJCA) opposes Senate Bill 20, a 12-week abortion ban misleadingly labeled “Care for Women, Children and Families Act,” and asks members of the North Carolina General Assembly to sustain Governor Cooper’s expected veto.

Why is a state-wide group of North Carolina Jewish clergy opposed to SB 20? Because for thousands of years Jewish tradition has embraced a sacred obligation to preserve life and protect and prioritize the health and well-being of the pregnant woman; this bill does not.

SB 20, by banning abortion after 12 weeks and creating numerous burdens (in-person consultations, waiting periods, forced ultrasounds, multiple in-person visits for medication abortion, burdensome licensing requirements on already heavily regulated abortion clinics), will negatively impact those seeking to safely terminate a pregnancy within the first trimester. Moreover, SB 20 will prevent individuals from seeking abortions later in pregnancy when they discover a fetal anomaly or face maternal health risks and choose to terminate a pregnancy before fetal viability. And finally, SB 20 will also negatively impact both health care providers and clergy who would offer abortion services and counseling.

How does SB 20 violate separation of church and state? Jewish tradition cherishes the sanctity of life, including the potential life during pregnancy, but does not believe that personhood and human rights begin with conception, but rather with birth as indicated by Exodus 21:22-23.

While other religions may believe that a human being exists at the moment of conception (and have lobbied for a total or 6-week ban so that SB 20 is presented as a sort of “compromise”), Jewish law dating back to the Torah has established that abortion is *not* murder. For the Jewish faith, and for those of many other faiths, a human being’s life does not begin until the first breath, live birth. Therefore, the only thing being compromised by SB 20 is women’s health.

Justice Blackmun’s opinion in *Roe v. Wade* discussed the lack of consensus among doctors, philosophers and theologians as to when life begins. This lack of consensus is unchanged to this date. Blackmun noted that it was the predominant attitude of the Jewish faith, and also the position of a large segment of the Protestant community, that “life does not begin until live birth.”

After finding that the Fourteenth Amendment's concept of personal liberty protected a "woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy," the Roe Court determined that a state could not "by adopting one theory of life" override all "rights of the pregnant woman." While the Supreme Court in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* overruled Roe and gave each state license to adopt one religion's theory of when human life begins, why would the North Carolina General Assembly want to run roughshod over the religious beliefs of many of its citizens? Isn't religious liberty for everyone?

The biblical commandment be fruitful and multiply — the obligation to have children — is only an obligation on men, not on women. Why? The rabbis of the Talmud hypothesize that the Torah would not impose a burden beyond what the body can handle. Women endanger themselves in pregnancy and childbirth, and death is a common outcome; therefore, the Torah could not compel a woman to have children. The death rate in North Carolina for women within 42 days of giving birth doubled from 2019 to 2021, according to CDC data. And black women continue to be more likely than white women to die from pregnancy-related causes.

As Jewish American clergy, we believe in the protection of privacy and freedom, especially religious freedom. We reaffirm our unequivocal support for complete access to reproductive health services, including abortion up to 20 weeks as presently exists in North Carolina since the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*.

And consistent with the Jewish value of pursuing *tzedek* (justice) for all, we clergy of the NCJCA vehemently oppose laws, including SB 20, that will create a patchwork of abortion access and push basic health care out of reach for many. Judaism supports abortion as health care — indeed, Jewish law views abortion as not only permissible, but required when necessary to safeguard the wellbeing, physical or mental, of a pregnant person.

We at NCJCA believe that every human being deserves the freedom to make their own decisions about their body, their family, and their future without interference by legislators imposing their religious beliefs upon those of other faiths. These intimate, personal, and private health decisions should be up to the pregnant person, often in consultation with that person's medical provider, family and clergy — but not with politicians and lawmakers.

About the North Carolina Jewish Clergy Association (NCJCA) The North Carolina Jewish Clergy Association (NCJCA) is an organization of rabbis and cantors of various streams serving congregations, agencies, organizations, and the broader Jewish community of North Carolina. In its gathering, it seeks to reflect the moral and religious voices of the Jewish community in North Carolina. It promotes the interests of Judaism and the Jewish people in North Carolina and throughout the world; serves as a collective voice of the North Carolina Jewish clergy community, and supports members in professional and personal growth.

For more information contact co-chairs, Rabbi Andy Koren of Greensboro (akoren@tegreensboro.org) and Rabbi Judy Schindler of Charlotte (Schindlerj@queens.edu), and Steering Committee members, Rabbi Lucy Dinner of Raleigh, Rabbi Daniel Greyber of Durham, Cantor Shira Lissek of Charlotte, Rabbi Emily Losben-Ostrov of Wilmington, Rabbi Batsheva Meiri of Asheville, Rabbi Melissa Simon of Chapel Hill, and Rabbi Eric Solomon of Raleigh.