



GOVERNMENT + POLITICS

HEALTH

COMMENTARY

An open letter on the state's abortion ban from Idaho's faith leaders

Lawmakers using religion to justify removal of rights to access health care of any kind constitutes theocratic tyranny, 15 Idaho faith leaders write in this guest column.

| SARA LAWALL

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📷 A doctor holds the hands of a patient. (Getty Images)

Editor's note: This column was written collectively by members of Idaho's statewide faith community listed in full below.

As Idaho faith leaders, dedicated to compassion, equity and justice for all people, we strongly condemn Idaho's abortion ban, decimating individual freedoms over one's own body and health care rights.

We represent a diversity of faith traditions – some of which have been on the forefront of protecting the sacred right of choice and individual conscience for longer than this has been a legal issue in our country. We all individually take seriously our moral obligation and pastoral responsibility to support those who find themselves facing life-altering decisions that are fraught with judgment and shame. We are committed to providing guidance, care, and the support of our traditions founded in unconditional love.

As the Idaho Supreme Court prepares to hear arguments in the Planned Parenthood Greater Northwest v. State of Idaho case, we wish to make it clear that religion does not speak with one voice on this issue.

Denying someone the right to exercise their divinely-given moral agency and bodily autonomy, and to make decisions about their family and future is a violation of both human rights and religious freedom. Lawmakers using religion to justify removal of rights to access health care of any kind constitutes theocratic tyranny.

No government committed to human rights and democracy can privilege the teachings of one religion over another. Let us be clear: Religion does not agree on the moral considerations surrounding abortion and the value of one life over another. But we do agree on religious freedom. Thus, religious freedom means reproductive freedom. We oppose any attempt to make specific religious doctrine concerning abortion the law for all Americans.

These extremist abortion laws place everyone's bodily autonomy and freedom at risk. And, as always, marginalized and low-income people are the most harmed. These bans don't stand alone – they are entrenched in a conservative, fundamentalist political agenda that has targeted voting rights, trans rights, immigration, education and more. It's never just been about abortion; it's about the control of our bodies.

Idaho already suffers from a shortage of medical providers, particularly in rural areas, carrying an overwhelming burden of care. When we criminalize those providers for offering health services we further burden and target the very people tasked with saving our lives.

This is not a law to protect freedom or the well-being of society, but a heavy yoke across the shoulders of already overburdened medical providers putting them in a moral crisis. People have the right to be able to trust that health care providers will provide the best care possible, not worry that they may instead impose their private, religious beliefs on their patients.

More than 50 years ago, many religious denominations passed courageous resolutions in support of women's moral agency and their right to a safe and legal abortion. Despite numerous legal challenges and social, scientific and medical advances, we reaffirm this

theological commitment: Women must be able to make their own moral decisions based on conscience and faith. We call for a religious and moral commitment to reproductive health, rights and access.

In faith,

Rev. Sara LaWall, Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

Rabbi Dan Fink, Congregation Ahavath Beth Israel

Rev. Andrew Kukla, First Presbyterian Church

Rev. Karen Hernandez, United Methodist

Rev. Meggan Manlove, Trinity Lutheran Church

Rev. Christie Dahlin, Hyde Park Mennonite

Rev. Jenny Willison Hirst, Callister United Methodist Church

Rev. Duane Anders, Cathedral of the Rockies

Rev. Jackie Holland, Center for Spiritual Living

Rev. Elizabeth Stevens, Unitarian Universalist Church of the Palouse

Rev. TJ Remaley, Southminster Presbyterian Church

Rev. Connie Winter-Eulberg, King of Glory Lutheran

Rev. Joseph Farnes, All Saints Episcopal Church

Rev. Irene Laudeman, Cathedral of the Rockies

Rev. Gretchen Bingea, Lutheran (retired)

Rev. Rob Tolluch, Woodlawn United Church of Christ

Rev. Daryl Blanksma, Whitney United Methodist Church

Rev. Rob Walters, Nampa First United Methodist Church

Rev. Mike Connor, Pocatello United Methodist Church

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SARA LAWALL

Sara LaWall is serves as the minister for the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

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