June 17, 2019

Harriette L Chandler
Senator
Massachusetts

Re: Support of Roe Act (S. 1209)

Dear Senator Chandler:

On behalf of the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM), we are writing in strong support of S. 1209, and urge Massachusetts to pass this legislation.

Established in 1977, the SMFM is the medical professional society for obstetricians who have additional training in the area of high-risk, complicated pregnancies. Our members see the sickest and most complex patients, and aim to improve care, research, advocacy and education for pregnant women. Because maternal-fetal medicine (MFM) physicians primarily provide care to women experiencing high-risk pregnancies, the Society is particularly concerned with access to pregnancy termination services for this population. Women with high-risk pregnancies are more likely to experience medical complications – for themselves, their fetus(es), or both – that can lead to increased maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality. For example, many genetic anomalies render a fetus nonviable and can lead to a loss or stillbirth late in pregnancy. In other instances, the life of the woman may be at risk due to a complicated pregnancy, and abortion may be required to protect a woman’s life or health.

Since the SMFM and its members are dedicated to optimizing maternal and child outcomes, assuring that medically appropriate options are available is critically important. We recognize that some physicians may have religious or moral objections to participating in certain health care services, including pregnancy termination. The Society supports protections afforded under federal law for an individual physician who refuses to participate in an abortion or other health care procedures to which the physician has a moral or religious objection so long as the physician has given appropriate notice to his or her employer.

The issue of pregnancy termination specifically is a deeply personal matter. Any legislation that regulates medical care should be based on scientific evidence and best practices. SMFM supports legislation that promotes the physician-patient relationship and is based upon scientific evidence. As such, SMFM supports legislation that would remove restrictions on the termination of pregnancy and allow women and their physicians to make evidence-based medical decisions as S. 1209 does. For high-risk pregnancies, limits on healthcare treatments present significant challenges to patient care. Enshrining a woman’s right to prevent, commence, terminate, or continue their own pregnancy and removing restrictions on use of medically appropriate methods of abortion will improve health care
providers’ ability to make ethical and professional decisions in the best interest of their patients. For high-risk patients that MFMs see, it is particularly important that physicians can communicate all treatment options to their patients without a time-bound restriction and exercise sound medical judgement in supporting a woman’s healthcare decision.

A woman’s right to choose an abortion has been settled law since 1973 when the Supreme Court ruled in Roe v. Wade. That decision makes clear that women may decide independently to have an abortion in the first trimester. S. 1209 upholds a woman’s Constitutional right to choose the best treatment for her health and maintains an established precedent for both patients and providers. A recent report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) ¹ comprehensively reviewed the state of science on all methods of abortion and confirmed once again that abortion is one of the safest medical procedures. It found that the biggest threats to the quality of abortion care in the United States are unnecessary government regulations on such care.

SMFM respectfully urges Massachusetts to support S. 1209. Please do not hesitate to contact Katie Schubert, SMFM’s Chief Advocacy Officer, at kschubert@smfm.org or (202) 517-6122, should you have questions.

Sincerely,

Brian Iriye, MD        Matt Granato, LL.M., MBA
President        Chief Executive Officer

¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. The Safety and Quality of Abortion Care in the United States (March 2018) at https://www.nap.edu/read/24950/chapter/1