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February 10, 2021

The Honorable Derek Skees
P.O. Box 9134
Kalispell, MT 59904
via email to Derek.Skees@mtleg.gov

Dear Rep. Skees,

Thank you for requesting a Torah (Jewish Biblical) viewpoint on the contentious issue of abortion. Our organization, the Coalition for Jewish Values, articulates the view of the mainstream of the American rabbinate, which is overwhelmingly Orthodox, observant, and pro-tradition. We promote the same values that we espoused not merely centuries, but millennia ago.

The Jewish view on abortion has been sadly misportrayed by many: Judaism definitely prohibits it as a simple matter of "choice." In fact, Judaism was unabashedly pro-life during primitive eras when abortion and infanticide were both considered normative.

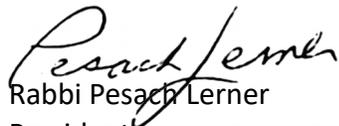
Jewish scriptures identify human life as a soul placed (breathed) within a body by G-d Himself, with inestimable sanctity and value [Genesis 2:7]. Rebecca is told not only that she is carrying twins, but the nature of each of her children is used to explain their behavior in utero [Gen. 25:23]. Jeremiah is told explicitly that his unique soul was placed into his mother's womb [Jer. 1:5], "Before I placed you in the womb I knew you, before you left the uterus I sanctified you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Jewish Law requires that we violate the Sabbath to save a fetal life, like that of any other living person. The Jewish view does include specific exceptions, especially that the mother's life (meaning her physical survival, without financial or convenience considerations) takes precedence, and thus it may be necessary – in extremely rare cases – to terminate a pregnancy. Leading pro-life organizations all agree with this viewpoint, that the survival of the mother must take precedence. In our teachings, there is also a difference between the first forty days of pregnancy, when the fetus has yet to truly form – which is, according to modern medical science, in accordance with the time when the fetal heartbeat can first be heard – and the duration of a pregnancy. In all of these, as well as other unique circumstances, consultation with leading rabbinic authorities would be required before making such a weighty decision. Again, it is simply not a "choice." For further information, we have a [position paper on abortion](#) available on our website or from our office.

Like so many things, the Bible's wisdom is sometimes recognized best with hindsight. We talk so often about "the morning after," but we need to speak openly and comfortably about the "night before" – the sacredness of marriage and family relationships. Thanks to the "right" to an abortion, a man can now arrogate for himself the "right" to walk away from his offspring, claiming that his child was the mother's "choice" to keep rather than abort, and thus not their joint responsibility. We must strive to be at least a bit holier, a bit more sanctified and to celebrate lifelong unions. We should allocate more funding to teaching about our responsibilities to others, including our future generations.

We can and should build a society with fewer questions about abortions, and more questions about preschools. That is where this discussion needs to lead us.

Yours Sincerely,


Rabbi Pesach Lerner
President