

# MICHIGAN STATE MEDICAL SOCIETY

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December 12, 2012

MEMO TO: The House Insurance Committee

MEMO FROM: John G. Bizon, MD, President

RE: Senate Bill 975

On behalf of the more than 16,000 physicians of the Michigan State Medical Society, I am writing to express our concerns relative to Senate Bill 975. While we share the objective of the sponsor to create an environment whereby a health professional may function in a manner consistent with their religious and moral convictions, we have concerns about the potential implications of enacting this legislation. Specifically, our concerns involve assuring that patients across the state do not somehow have their access to needed care impeded due to the moral convictions of another person.

First, it should be noted that Senator Moolenaar has gone to exceptional lengths to accommodate the concerns of MSMS and to address the most significant concerns of the physician community relative to this legislation. Additionally, Senator Moolenaar and his staff have welcomed additional comments from the physician community to improve the wording of the legislation. Ultimately, it is the sense of physicians that this legislation is not needed because health care workers in nearly all settings are already working with their colleagues to come to arrangements at work or in practice in a manner consistent with their moral and ethical convictions. Additionally, there is already a great deal of self selection that occurs with respect to prospective employees. Those prospective employees with specific moral objections are often best equipped to make a determination about whether or not they may feel comfortable in the employment for which they are seeking.

Senate Bill 975 would impose a new requirement that physician practices to implement an employee policy regarding moral objections as well as response timelines. However, the greater concern for physicians is how this policy could potentially impact the delivery of health care services in Michigan. Michigan already has physician and other professional shortages that create impediments to access for patients in Michigan. Senate Bill 975 may have additional unintended consequences that might make accessing certain types of services very difficult for patients. Physicians have had extensive experience in balancing their religious and ethical beliefs but never at the expense of the needs of their patient. Balancing a sincerely held moral belief and the needs of a patient can be a complicated and multifaceted set of considerations that will always be difficult to encapsulate in legislation.