

Romuva North America
7734 N. Merriman Road
#202
Westland, MI 48185

May 6, 2022

Dear Legislator,

We are elders and leaders of Romuva North America, the ancient Lithuanian faith. We were first incorporated in Wisconsin in 1991 as Romuva US and reincorporated as Romuva North America in Michigan in 2020.

Our faith upholds the spiritual and bodily autonomy of all people. The draft majority decision by the Supreme Court of the United States to overturn *Roe v. Wade* is based on the religious doctrine of the signatory justices. Furthermore, it is not the will of the people. 59% of U.S. citizens support abortion rights.

This decision will subvert our religious freedom as guaranteed in the Constitution. For centuries, Lithuanian songs, prayers, and traditions (carried to the U.S. by immigrants such as our grandparents) have venerated the Rue plant as a symbol of womanhood, in particular the unmarried woman. As you may know, *Ruta Graveolens* (common Rue) is an abortifacient, a way to bring on the menses (period) of someone who has conceived. Even today, a sprig of Rue is included in a Lithuanian-American bridal bouquet, or a wreath of rue is worn by the bride and removed after the exchange of vows as a symbol of the potential of the couple to bear children.

Even married Lithuanian-American women kept Rue in their gardens to be used when necessary. Thankfully, modern medicine now has more reliable and safer alternatives to terminate a pregnancy. Justice Alito's majority opinion states that abortion is neither "deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition" nor "implicit in the concept of ordered liberty." We beg to differ. Prior to the mid nineteenth century, herbal abortifacients like Rue were sold by pharmacies in the U.S. and remedy recipes were freely and legally published, distributed, and handed down from mother to daughter. While not codified in the U.S. Constitution, abortion has a long history of acceptability here.

As church elders, we are not only concerned with the ability of a woman to make decisions about her own body and reproductive health, we are concerned for other human rights decided by the Supreme Court but not subsequently codified in the Constitution, like interracial and same-sex marriage, birth control, and the right to travel. If we use Justice Alito's benchmark that anything not codified by the Constitution is at the mercy of the Court, we should also be gravely concerned about the other human rights like the legality of interracial marriage. If the court chose to overturn *Loving v. Virginia* on the same grounds, one of their very own justice's marriages would be illegal.

It is unsettling that the Supreme Court of the United States would subvert the will of the people. This seems to have been precipitated by the stacking of the Court with religious conservatives wishing to make this country a Christian theocracy. May we remind readers that Article 11 of the Treaty of Tripoli begins "As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion . . ." This treaty was commissioned by George Washington, ratified unanimously by

Congress, and signed by President John Adams. And of course, the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees against the prohibition of free exercise of religion.

Our faith practices love, compassion, and tolerance of other religions. But that tolerance does not extend to the stripping of human rights from citizens, nor the forcible imposition of others' religious laws on our adherents.

As a legislator, we are asking you to contact the Supreme Court on behalf of your constituents to request that they consider the impact this decision will have on anyone with a uterus facing an unwanted, unsafe, or unviable pregnancy. In Seniūnė Rzeznik's state of Michigan, abortion providers and recipients would face felony charges under a 1931 law that was never repealed. Striking down *Roe v. Wade*, an established precedent for almost 50 years, and subsequently upheld by *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* would put this country back decades and result in many unnecessary maternal deaths and children in foster care or worse, in unsafe homes.

While we may be a small religious denomination, we are guaranteed religious autonomy by the U.S. Constitution and this decision would violate our religious freedom. We hope that you will encourage the Supreme Court to reconsider.

Sincerely,

Leslie Rzeznik, Michigan
Laura Juozunas, Illinois
Prudence Priest, California
Seniūnės / Elders
Romuva North America