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**Testimony to the State of Ohio House Committee on Community and Family
Advancement
November 4, 2015**

Chairman Derickson, Vice Chair Ginter, Ranking member Howse, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on House Bill 294.

In my senior year of college, right after Thanksgiving, I turned 22 years old. To celebrate, my partner came to visit me in Athens, OH, and took me to dinner at my favorite restaurant. As we were finishing our meals, my phone rang, and my mother's name appeared on the screen. I figured she wanted to wish me happy birthday and took the call. But what began as a delightful evening turned very sour when instead she said, "Happy birthday, sweetie. I've been terminated at work, and we will no longer have health insurance."

There is never a convenient time to lose your health insurance, but for me, the timing of this news was more than inconvenient. Months prior, I received an abnormal result on a Pap test, through which I discovered that I had HPV. Consequently, instead of having a Pap test every three years to renew my birth control prescription, I needed to have the test every year. And while getting the test is not something I particularly enjoy, my birth control was very important to me — not just for the protection it lends me from unintended pregnancy, but also because it eliminates twelve weeks from the year when I would otherwise be out of commission due to menstrual pain and iron loss. It is for this reason that I began taking birth control two years before becoming sexually active. For me, it's not just contraception—it's vital medicine.

So with no insurance, where was I to receive my Pap test? I was financially independent, but as a full-time student raking in an income of roughly \$500 a month, there was no space between money for food and money for bills where a hospital visit could fit. I couldn't go to the university health clinic—they would discover instantly that I no longer had coverage, and make me purchase it from the school even though I could not afford it. That's when I called Planned Parenthood.

Though the Athens Planned Parenthood health center was open only three days a week at that time, they were able to accommodate my schedule, and they fit me in just two days after of the time I called. The doctor was professional, yet relatable; I felt very comfortable with him. He put me at ease during my Pap test, and after the test he asked me questions about my general well-being: how I was managing school and relationships, whether I was under particular stress, and so on. He encouraged me to relax during my final semester of college, and told me that keeping my stress low was important to my reproductive health, just like getting my Pap smear. Then, the receptionist gave me a bag containing a 13-month supply of birth control, and billed me for the visit plus the prescription: based on my income, a total of zero dollars. Feeling very grateful, I made a small donation, and went on my way. In the quest to reduce my stress, Planned Parenthood was the best place to start.

After I graduated from Ohio University, it took some time to get on my feet financially. I came to Columbus, and for a while, struggled to find work that would pay me enough to rise above the poverty level. I went without insurance for many months, and could not afford to keep my health totally in check. Luckily, Medicaid expansion soon graced Ohio — once I was approved for Medicaid coverage, one of the first places I went was Planned Parenthood. They gave me another Pap test [for which I was overdue], and from that exam I learned that my body had likely cleared the HPV infection. This exam and my birth control refill were covered by Medicaid. A little while later, I went back to Planned Parenthood for an IUD — though I was far from my initial

health center location in Athens, the care I received was just as phenomenal, and I am grateful for the peace of mind my IUD provides while I now pursue a career in medicine.

My story is not unusual. Many of my friends and loved ones have dealt with similar challenges, and despite our income, geography, or position in life, Planned Parenthood is there for us. That is why I am standing with Planned Parenthood today.

I urge the committee to do the right thing – vote no on House Bill 294 and do not defund Planned Parenthood.

Thank you.