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Ohio House of Representatives

Community and Family Advancement Committee

Testimony of Linda Bales Todd in Opposition to HB 294

Thank you, Chairman Derickson, Ranking Minority Member Howse, and members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee, for hearing my testimony.

I ask you to reject House Bill 294, which proposes defunding Planned Parenthood.

For my entire life, I've been a United Methodist – a Mainline, Christian denomination of 12.8 million people. United Methodists are found in the United States, Africa, the Philippines and parts of Europe. It's a denomination founded by John Wesley, an Anglican, who strongly believed that health care is a basic human right – something to which all people deserve access.

For eleven years I worked for the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society in Washington, D.C. as the Director of Women and Children's Advocacy. One gift of my work was meeting with women around the U.S. to discuss ways they'd like to achieve a better life including decisions about when or if to have children.

A significant amount of my time was spent on advocacy for international family planning because we knew 200 million women around the world didn't have access to contraception information and services. We knew, with contraception, women could decide whether or not to have children, could prevent unexpected pregnancies that might lead to abortions and could space their children, which reduces child and maternal mortality rates.

My conversations with African women about reproductive health, in some respects, paralleled those with poor women and women of color in the United States. One conversation took place in Kenya with about 15 women. We talked in private not in the company of their husbands. I was astonished by their honesty knowing they lived in a culture where men can demand sex at any time. I was moved by their vulnerability knowing that if their husbands discovered what they were saying, they risked possible threats and even violence.

We talked about birth control. I heard story after story about how birth control wasn't available and, if it was, it was too costly. One woman proclaimed: "Sometimes I just feel like I'm a baby factory, and there's nothing I can do about it." They wept. They wept when we talked. In so many respects the world community, and I could say the Ohio community, has failed women because we have prioritized other needs over theirs and, as a result, the fabric of society is severely frayed.

I worked closely with Planned Parenthood on these issues and have great respect for this organization. For 87 years, Planned Parenthood has served women in Ohio. Twenty-eight Planned Parenthood centers exist in Ohio but only a handful perform abortions. Planned Parenthood provides critical HIV testing for women which is so needed given the spikes in HIV in African American and Latina women. Plus, given

significant increases in heroin addiction, we desperately need organizations where people can be tested and, if positive, steered toward treatment. These twenty-eight Planned Parenthood sites are bringing much needed health services to those who can least afford it.

Yes, Planned Parenthood provides abortion. It's legal. Yes, in other states they have donated fetal tissue for research. It's legal. Yes, they provide much needed services that, ironically, reduce the need for abortion and save women's lives.

States that have defunded Planned Parenthood are not faring too well. According to the American Public Health Association, more than two-thirds of states have reported difficulty ensuring provider participation with Medicaid programs, and approximately half of the States report challenges insuring specialty providers — including OB/GYNs — for Medicaid programs.

In a perfect world, none of God's people would struggle. All would be considered as sacred worth and treated as such. If you are concerned about abortion, let's work together to create a world where we can reduce the need for abortion. Defunding Planned Parenthood seems to be an attempt at dismantling it. Dismantling Planned Parenthood makes abortion MORE likely, because women will have fewer services and fewer options. Let's not defund or dismantle an organization that works!

I urge you to vote against HB 294. Thank you.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.