

Jess Cohen
Cleveland, Ohio

Testimony to the State of Ohio Senate Committee on Government Oversight and Reform

January 26, 2016

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

I've been a Planned Parenthood "client" since I was 16 years old (I'm 25 now). I went there for the first time simply to support my best friend, who wanted to get birth control. Though I was considering becoming sexually active, I was too scared to speak up and say I wanted to learn about birth control, too. After experiencing how friendly and welcoming the staff was at the office we went to in Northeast Ohio, I became emboldened and brave enough to come back for a second visit -- by myself, no less -- and take charge of my own right to contraception. I was a nervous, broke teenager who didn't have anywhere else to turn to with my questions, my requests, my fears, and Planned Parenthood was there for me immediately and has been there ever since.

I live in another state now, in an area with no nearby Planned Parenthood office, though I still choose to get my prescription filled through them because Planned Parenthood has been nothing short of wonderful. I can't imagine a world in which this organization, an organization that is a support system for the voiceless, doesn't exist.

Ever since that first visit, I've been blessed with something amazing: A welcome, friendly, staff in a welcome, friendly environment in which I can explore all the scary, unfamiliar, confusing aspects of sexuality and STDs and contraception and everything in between without feeling intimidated or ostracized or financially stressed. That should be a basic human right, as far as I'm concerned. The fact that Planned Parenthood -- an organization whose staff have never judged me, never looked at me strangely, never balked when asked a sensitive question, never turned me down when I asked for help -- is facing an uncertain future in the wake of potential funding cuts is truly frightening. If such a supportive, helpful organization was defunded, what message would that convey to future generations?

I hope this testimony convinces at least one person to do what's right.