

Testimony of Linda Pan
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Opposing House Bill 294
Ohio Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
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Chairman Coley, Ranking Minority Member Yuko and members of the Government Oversight and Reform committee, thank you for allowing me to share my testimony today.

My name is Linda Pan. I was born in Chillicothe, grew up in Cincinnati and now I am back in Columbus for medical school at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. I went to Harvard University for my undergraduate degree and lived for a year in Japan, but Ohio is my home. I want to stay here after I finish medical school and serve the people of this state, but even now as just a medical student I will do my best to ensure that all people can receive the health care they need. That is why I am here today in opposition of House Bill 294.

I understand the anti-abortion viewpoint. At the core of this debate is a question we will never find the answer to—when does life begin? Some say “at fertilization” or “if it has a heart beat, it must be alive.” Others say “when it can survive outside the uterus” or as taught in the Jewish faith “at birth.” But while we debate and argue and guess as to whether that thing inside the woman is or is not living, we miss the bigger picture. The woman is very, very much alive. Does her life not matter? Is control of her own body not important? Is letting her take care of herself in a way that she sees fit not a priority? By opposing abortion, we place the value of a fertilized egg over the value of something that lives, breathes, and is undeniably alive. This is why I unequivocally support abortion.

But this debate about abortion is nothing new, and if your opinions are formed about it already, there is probably very little I can say to change your mind. We can agree to disagree. I’m okay with that. But I am also here today because there’s something really important that I need you to know. You may have heard it before. In fact, I’m willing to bet that if you listened to even just a bit of the other opposition testimonies, you’ve probably heard it. But just in case, I’m here to say it again. Here it is: Yes Planned Parenthood provides abortion care, but they also do so much more. I repeat: Planned Parenthood does SO much more than provide abortions.

I’m not an expert. I can’t tell you every service that Planned Parenthood offers. But what I can tell you is that they have so many services that have nothing, absolutely nothing to do with abortion. Things like providing free HIV/AIDS testing; education about healthy relationships, domestic violence, and intimate partner violence; and various programs that support pregnant moms before, during and up to two years after birth. There are even programs on financial literacy and career success for youth in foster care and the justice system. Planned Parenthood offers counseling and sex education for safer sex practices, which reduces the number of unintended pregnancies in the first place. We would never have to debate the ethicality of abortion if it never got to that point!

But even if nothing I have said so far has stuck, can’t we agree on one thing? Cancer. It’s a six-letter word that stands for something terrible. Yet we all have cancer cells within our bodies, and carry the capacity to develop cancer. As I have learned in medical school, a cancerous cell is simply a normal cell that has lost control of its replication and started to multiply like crazy. We all have cancer cells even right now, but

don't all get cancer because we have immune systems that can detect when a cell has lost it and become cancerous, and kill that cell. No one likes cancer. No one deserves to get cancer. Can't we agree on that?

But here's the good news—many cancers, if caught early enough, can be treated, and treated quite effectively. Take cervical cancer. What's a cervix? It's a fancy name for the hallway to the uterus, and it, like a liver or brain, can also get cancer. If caught in the early stages and treated, the percent chance that that patient will still be alive after five years is 97.5%¹. That's almost a guarantee that that woman will survive cancer. But if the cancer is not caught until the latest stage, that five-year survival percentage drops to 9.3%. We just went from a 97.5% chance of survival, to 9.3% chance. That's huge. How can we stop cancer from progressing to such a late stage that we essentially stand no chance of curing it?

It's simple. We screen for cancer in people who outwardly seem to be having no problems at all. Catch it early, and treat it before it gets to that point of no return. That's what a pap smear does—it takes a bit of the cervix to see if there are any abnormal cells. Cancer screening can reduce the incidence of cervical cancer by up to 80%². And guess who provides screening for cervical cancer? Planned Parenthood. Planned Parenthood provides more than 14,000 cancer screenings annually. And this is not only for people who have cervixes (e.g. women). They also provide breast cancer screening, and men can get breast cancer too. Not only does Planned Parenthood provide cancer screening, which effectively can help prevent cancer in many people, but it also does so for those low-income patients who have far fewer options for where they can receive healthcare. Poor people are just that—people. They are entitled to health care options that work for them. By taking away Planned Parenthood and the services it provides, we take away healthcare access for some of the most vulnerable women and men around us.

I stand for Planned Parenthood because I support abortion. I also stand for Planned Parenthood because I've learned about the necessity of screening and treating sexually transmitted infections; how crucial it is that teens learn to use condoms to prevent unwanted pregnancies; and how important it is that a woman in an abusive relationship has somewhere to go to get help. But I also stand for Planned Parenthood because I hate cancer. Especially cancer that is preventable, treatable and almost curable if caught early. Planned Parenthood has done more than you or I have ever done to prevent and treat cancer. When I become a physician, I can do my part. But you can do something now. We can put aside our differences regarding abortion, and instead focus on healthcare access for our communities in need. If you hate cancer, please do not pass House Bill 294.

Thank you for your time, and I will take any questions you may have.

¹ Quinn MA, Benedet JL, Odicino F, et al. Carcinoma of the cervix uteri. *Int J Gynaecol Obstet* 2006; 95:S43

² International Agency for Research on Cancer. *IARC Handbooks of Cancer Prevention*. Vol. 10: Cervix Cancer Screening. Lyon, France: IARC Press; 200