

Dr. Catherine Romanos
Opponent Testimony to House Bill 214
Ohio House Health Committee
October 11, 2017

As a family physician who cares for women, men, and families in Ohio, I write to express my strong opposition to House Bill 214. This bill would irreparably compromise the patient-provider relationship by undermining the trust between patients and their health care providers.

Confidentiality is a cornerstone of the patient-provider relationship; patients must be able to trust their doctors to keep their personal and private information confidential. By requiring providers to police their patients' decision-making, this bill undermines that essential trust. I am deeply concerned that this legislation would potentially coerce doctors into keeping medical information from their patients, and patients from asking necessary questions about their pregnancies. This political interference in medical practice is dangerous and irresponsible.

My patients, who are often struggling with complex decisions, deserve trust—not suspicion—from me as a health care provider. I see the importance of a trusting patient-provider relationship in my practice every day.

Every time this issue comes up, I immediately think of my patient, Elizabeth. Elizabeth was 44 and had given up on having a family when she met her husband at age 40. After trying to conceive for many years, she was thrilled to find herself pregnant. Elizabeth's husband was overseas, serving in the US military, and she was alone in Ohio. She had immigrated to this country to be with her husband and her family and support network were back at home. Elizabeth she had trouble telling me her story through tears and sobs. She had just learned that her baby had a 99% chance of being born with Down's Syndrome. She was holding out that 1% hope that it was not true, but scheduling an abortion in the event that chromosomal analysis confirmed the suspected diagnosis.

Elizabeth told me over and over again that she loved her baby already. She said she didn't want to know the sex, it would be too painful. She said she couldn't bear the thought of never meeting this baby. However, she felt that at her age, it was selfish to bring a child with special needs into the world. She was terrified that she and her husband, who is some years older than her, would not be around for a large part of the child's life. Without a support network or family here in this country, she did not know who she would rely on to help raise this child if she carried the pregnancy to term and something ever happened to her. She terminated her pregnancy and said a prayer for her unborn child. She was clear that this painful decision was the best parenting decision she could make, no matter the pain that is caused her.

It is also alarming that this bill is not an outlier in Ohio; far from it. It is simply the latest in a series of increasingly invasive laws passed by Ohio politicians to restrict access to safe abortion since *Roe v. Wade*. The cumulative result of these laws is to shame and punish patients for making personal and private decisions about their families and their health and push safe and legal abortion out of reach for many in our state. These restrictions also have a disproportionate impact on those who already face far too many barriers to health care—people with low incomes, people of color, and people living in our state's rural areas.

As a healthcare provider, I know that I best serve my patients when I give them the information and tools that allow them to make the best decisions for their health and the well-being of their families. I believe firmly that a patient's health—and not politics—should drive important medical decisions.

I therefore urge you to reject House Bill 214.

Sincerely,

Catherine Romanos, MD