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Opponent Testimony
HB 258
Ohio House Health Committee
December 6, 2017

As the President of the Columbus Medical Association and a practicing obstetrician/doctor, I see the real impact of political decisions on patients' health every day. Regardless of one's personal faith orientation, it is completely untenable for the State of Ohio to criminalize physician behavior and deny a medical procedure to patients that is both Constitutional and consistent with a physician's professional medical standards of care. I am asking you to vote against HB 258.

Every day I counsel my patients about all their options, including abortion, particularly when their baby has a lethal anomaly or when pregnancy would threaten their own life. This law would make what physicians do every day a felony. Statistically, there is proof that women will continue to have abortions regardless of whether they are legal or not, so politicians should ensure that they can be done safely and legally and physicians do not have to fear prosecution for doing their ethical duty. By making abortion illegal in Ohio you will NOT prevent abortions BUT you will see an increase in septic abortions and maternal death. All you have to do is look back to the years before 1972 when women came to the emergency room infected and often died attempting to abort a fetus. Medically, this bill does not make sense because seeing a heartbeat does not ensure a healthy outcome and often the mother does not even know she is pregnant at 6 weeks.

Ohio has a terrible track record when it comes to infant mortality and there are task forces which are working to reduce infant mortality. Unfortunately, when you force women to carry a pregnancy conceived by rape or incest or otherwise unwanted, you also see a woman who will not seek prenatal care. Poor prenatal care has already been shown to worsen infant mortality and outcomes.

Each bill may not seem like a big deal, but it has added up to the point where it is becoming virtually impossible for a woman to obtain an abortion in Ohio, particularly a woman in poverty or from a rural, underserved area, who is unable to take off time to travel to the clinic multiple times or find transportation to one of the few clinics left in Ohio. If you and other politicians truly care about women and life, you should support women through these difficult situations and fund organizations such as Planned Parenthood, provide free contraception, work on stopping the cycle of poverty and teenage pregnancy, and keep abortion safe and legal.

Criminalizing physicians' actions that are consistent with their professional standards of care is simply unacceptable. Abortion is one of the safest procedures that gynecologists perform and is actually safer than pregnancy itself.

If laws like this are allowed in Ohio, it will not be long before there will be a shortage of obstetricians in our state, as young professionals will not choose Ohio to locate their practice. Why would these young doctors voluntarily place themselves in the midst of a potential legal quagmire that would prevent them from meeting their moral obligations to provide care for their patients?

Regardless of your personal beliefs, this bill is unconstitutional and will be challenged, adding an undue burden to the taxpayers of this state. Women and the doctors who care for them should be the ONLY ones making decisions regarding a pregnancy. Please vote against HB 258. This bill has been reintroduced several times in different forms and has not gone anywhere in the past and it should be stopped again in committee. Governor Kasich vetoed it in the past and I sincerely hope this committee will do the right thing and vote against HB 258 before it goes to the floor.