

Opponent Testimony for House Bill 258
Senate Health, Human Services & Medicaid Committee
Submitted by: Becky Perkins
December 5, 2018

Chair Burke and Members of the Senate Health, Human Services & Medicaid Committee:

I'm submitting this written testimony in opposition to House Bill 258, which if enacted, would prevent Ohio women from accessing safe and legal abortion – including women for whom carrying the pregnancy to term would force them to bear a child conceived from rape or incest.

As has been stated by medical professionals, a fetal heartbeat is often detectable prior to the woman having knowledge of her own pregnancy. Contrary to assumption, the absence of a menstrual period does not always indicate pregnancy. Some women naturally have very long menstrual cycles, some have health conditions or take medications that delay or stop periods, and others have regular periods while pregnant. Women who have suffered psychological trauma – such as in the case of rape – may experience erratic cycles or lose track of the timing of their cycles altogether. Restricting access to a full range of healthcare options when a woman does not even have knowledge of her full medical condition is highly unethical and potentially dangerous.

As a survivor of rape and a professional who has worked in victim advocacy for 15 years, I find it unconscionable that H.B. 258 makes no exceptions for rape or incest. The refusal to include such an exemption sends the message that the lives of women and girls who are raped or suffer incest are simply not worth as much as the fetuses they are forced to carry. I fear it also sends the message that women routinely lie about being raped, therefore their claims cannot be trusted as a basis for obtaining an abortion. Victims of rape in Ohio deserve better.

While some women who become pregnant as a result of rape choose to carry their pregnancies to term, the point is that it's *their choice* to do so. No woman or girl should be forced to bear her rapist's child against her will. Such a perversion of human decency is no better than the crime of rape itself. Imagine a girl molested and impregnated by her father being forced to bear that child: H.B. 258 would require it. Many victims of incest and domestic violence are forced to become pregnant as a means for their abusers to further control and manipulate them. Some abusers deliberately hide or destroy their victims' birth control. And children born into such circumstances often suffer at the hands of the abuser as well. If enacted, H.B. 258 would become another tool in the arsenal of rapists, human traffickers, and child molesters – an alarming fact that I would hope Ohio would not want to enable.

I'm certain that the sponsors of H.B. 258 would argue that women who become pregnant from rape or incest (or women who face an unwanted pregnancy under any circumstances) can simply put their babies up for adoption. But such a thing is far from simple. Aside from the legal, financial, and emotional complexities of the adoption process, being pregnant and giving birth is not merely a nine-month distraction during which a baby grows in utero and is then born. Pregnancy is a disruption of the

woman's life and body. It renders women more vulnerable to violence (including murder), abuse, and discrimination, it interrupts work and schooling, and it causes considerable sickness in many women. For many victims of rape and incest, pregnancy resulting from the crime is an extension of the violation of body, mind, and spirit that further traumatizes them. It is despicable to force women to endure additional trauma based on the perceived virtues of adoption.

It has been demonstrated time and again that comprehensive sex education from an early age, and access to free or reduced-cost birth control, are the most effective means by which abortion rates are measurably reduced. Yet, sex education and access to contraception are routinely swept aside as intrusions on family values and parenting. These unfounded fears will not change the facts that women have sex, that too many women and girls are raped, and that sometimes they get pregnant when they don't want to. Instead of forcing women and girls to bear children by legislating away safe and legal abortion, it makes more sense to facilitate access to accurate health information and preventative resources that would render abortion an option that is rarely sought or needed. It makes sense to invest in preventing sexual assault and protecting children from sexual abuse and human trafficking, so that the trauma of these crimes and pregnancies resulting from them are prevented.

As a mother who conceived after a painful period of infertility, I do not regard pregnancy or abortion lightly. I fundamentally believe in the rights of women to choose if and when to have a baby. Moreover, I find it extremely troubling that H.B. 258 would force women and girls to carry pregnancies to term when 1) they may not yet even know they are pregnant, and/or 2) their pregnancy came from rape or incest. Ohio's women and girls, and Ohio's survivors of rape and incest, are already-born, living, breathing human beings who deserve to have their bodies and choices respected.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.