



Ohio Legislature Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee HB 258 Opponent and Interested Party Hearing – December 5 Testimony presented by Delitha Gail Sparks, Associate Director

Good Afternoon Chairman Burke and Ranking Minority Member Tavares,

My name is Delitha Gail Sparks. I am a resident of Cleveland and I am the Associate Director of New Voices for Reproductive Justice. I am here today to share my testimony in opposition to House Bill 258, the 6-week abortion ban. This bill is a threat to the lives of all women who need abortion access and this bill is a threat to the health and well-being of the Black women New Voices serves across Ohio. For far too long Black women have experienced an unequal playing field in our communities when it comes to health care and traditionally when anti-abortion policies and laws are passed, access to healthcare becomes even more limited for Black women. In my own experience, I have had to access the medical resources available to me and utilize my reproductive options to seek an abortion to protect my own health. The decision to have an abortion is deeply personal and we should Trust Black Women to make decisions about our bodies and our reproduction for ourselves. It is incumbent upon The Ohio Legislature to focus on the long-term health and well-being of women in our state as opposed to limiting our ability to make decisions about our healthcare.

New Voices is creating a powerful movement across Ohio for Reproductive Justice – the Human Right of us all to control our bodies, sexuality, gender, work, reproduction and the ability to form our families. For the last 15 years, New Voices has advocated for and against Reproductive Justice policies at the federal, state and local levels. We have seen legislation like House Bill 258 before over and over and over again. What has remained unchanged is the need for women to have access to all our healthcare options including access to abortion. An anti-abortion bill such as this will result in Black women losing access to healthcare services during the most vulnerable and desperate circumstances in our lives. In my eyes, this bill is unconstitutional and extremely dangerous for Black women's health.

I would like to leave you with some perspective on how Black Ohioans feel about abortion access. New Voices with our national policy partner, In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda, has conducted polling research about abortion and important Reproductive Justice issues. Of 1.5 million Black Ohioan, 90% strongly support a woman's right to abortion, 8 in 10 feel that we should Trust Black Women to make decisions that are best for them and when it comes to abortion care, 98% of Black Ohioans want this care to be directed by a doctor – not The Ohio Legislature which polled at less than 1%.

I would be happy to answer any questions the committee members may have. Thank you for listening to my testimony in opposition to House Bill 258.