

December 11, 2018

Testimony of Marcy Schwartz, M.D. opposing HB 258
Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee

I am a pediatric cardiologist with a sub-specialty in pediatric and fetal echocardiography (ultrasound of the heart). I have been in the field for twenty years and have imaged hundreds of fetuses. My job includes counseling expectant families when they are referred to me by obstetricians for suspected fetal cardiac anomalies.

As you are well aware, the Heartbeat Bill would essentially ban all abortion in Ohio, as most pregnancies are unknown until well after 6 weeks. In addition, maternal and fetal conditions that sometimes affect the decision to proceed with abortion cannot be known until at least the second trimester.

The decision to have an abortion is heart-wrenching for families, and the last thing they are seeking. The people sitting in my office are expectant families who desperately want to deliver healthy babies. These are incredibly complicated decisions, which should be left to families and their physicians. For example, the presence of a complex congenital heart defect can require multiple invasive procedures and surgeries and lifelong care. On the more severe end of the spectrum, some of these complex heart disease diagnoses are debilitating, requiring repeated open heart surgeries and catheterizations throughout a person's life time –and are still non-curative. Also, a diagnosis of structural heart disease in the fetus is associated with a higher incidence of genetic abnormalities and many other birth defects (kidney, gastro-intestinal, etc.) which also require lifelong care. Many other pediatric subspecialties face similar dilemmas.

In my experience, the overwhelming majority of families decide to keep their babies at any cost - -- but it should be their decision, taking into account the expected quality of the future life and the amount of suffering expected to be endured. (And who is responsible for the financially crippling medical expenses which most families cannot afford? Is the state prepared to pay these bills?)

Additionally, the welfare and risks to the expectant mother must be weighed. In my religion, Judaism, the well-being of the mother takes precedence over that of the fetus when the mother's health or life is at risk.

Make no mistake, the Heartbeat Bill will make safe and legal abortion less accessible but it will likely not stop a large percentage of unsafe abortions. This bill is unsafe, uncompassionate, and unconstitutional.

Thank you for your time.