



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

December 10, 2018

The Honorable Sen. Dave Burke
Chairperson, Senate Committee on Health,
Human Services and Medicaid
1 Capitol Square, Ground Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Re: OPPOSITION for HB 258, Testimony from American Atheists in opposition to legislation restricting abortion services.

Dear Chairperson Burke and Members of the Senate Committee on Health, Human Services and Medicaid:

American Atheists, on behalf of its more than 1,200 constituents in Ohio, testifies in opposition to HB 258, a controversial bill which would limit access for millions of Ohio women to reproductive health care. This bill seeks to criminalize women and their doctors, to undermine Supreme Court precedent protecting women's rights, and to make it impossible for Ohioans to access legally protected abortion services. It seeks to impose one narrow religious viewpoint on the vast majority of Ohio women who support reproductive freedom. We urge you to vote against this unnecessary and harmful bill.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the "wall of separation" between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation's communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. As advocates for the health, safety, and well-being of all Americans, American Atheists objects to efforts to subordinate health care to the religious beliefs of others.

Polls consistently show that 7 in 10 Americans support legal access to abortion. In Ohio, the Pew Research Center reports that 48% of adults believe that abortion should be available in all or most cases.¹ Despite this widespread support, Ohio lawmakers continue to advance measure after measure to attack abortion providers, restrict access to health care, and impose burdens on women seeking abortions. The advocates behind this agenda clearly indicate their intention to ban all abortion, including in cases of rape and incest, and even when a woman's health is at risk. These bans are not about protecting women's health and well-being. They are about imposing their religious agenda on everyone else.

¹ Pew Research Center. (2014). Views About Abortion by State. Available at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/compare/views-about-abortion/by/state/>

HB 258 is clearly unconstitutional – it was written purposefully so in the hope that an activist Supreme Court will upend 40 years of precedent. It requires invasive, unworkable assessments of fetal heartbeat in order to create a near ban of abortion in the state. Moreover, it provides an exceedingly narrow definition of medical emergencies, which would prevent doctors from taking vital action to protect women’s health. Banning abortion and limiting access doesn’t reduce the need for abortion, it just forces women into extreme situations that could risk their health and lives, and criminalizes medical providers.

Like most Ohioans, we believe that women are capable of making decisions about when and how to have families. Women, not lawmakers, should make these critical decisions affecting their lives. These health care decisions should be made in consultation with a doctor who knows her circumstances and not by a politician with a religious agenda.

We urge you to vote against this dangerous and unconstitutional legislation. If this misguided bill is allowed to go into effect, it will have terrifying, life altering implications for women in Ohio. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists’ opposition to HB 258, please contact Alison Gill, American Atheists Legal and Policy Director at 908.276.7300 x9 or by email at agill@atheists.org.

Sincerely,

Jen Scott
Regional Director Midwest
American Atheists

cc: All members of the Ohio Senate Committee on Health, Human Services and Medicaid