



HB 431
Opponent Testimony
Blyth Barnow
Harm Reduction Faith Manager
Faith In Public Life
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Chairman Lang, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer opponent testimony for HB 431.

My name is Blyth Barnow, I serve as the Harm Reduction Faith Manager for Faith in Public Life in Ohio. Faith in Public Life is a network of clergy who are united in the prophetic pursuit of the common good.

I have offered opponent testimony for this bill previously. I am here again asking you not to pass this dangerous, ineffective, and costly piece of legislation. In this time of economic crisis Ohio simply cannot afford it. In the midst of a pandemic it is not ethical to spend nearly \$200,000 on a database that will produce little results while our state is cutting spending everywhere else.

Furthermore, as faith leaders we know that shame and increased criminalization do nothing to make our communities safer. Instead it puts those most marginalized at higher risk by pushing them farther into isolation and fear. It is for these reasons that we offer opponent testimony for HB 431 and ask you not to pass this legislation.

This legislation will not increase the safety of people engaged in sex work or human trafficking survivors. In fact it will do just the opposite. When clients are threaten people who do sex work are put at higher risk. Often being forced, by circumstance or coercion, to work more frequently and in deeper isolation without protective measures they were once able to implement.

As faith leaders we reject false moralism and demand meaningful action that would actually serve to protect children of God. Policies such as these are often cloaked in well meaning concern, which often simply amounts to a distorted version of christian morality that costs women and workers their safety and their lives.

HB 431 may be rooted in such good intentions but it does not reflect the on the ground reality of people engaging in sex work. The sacred lives of those engaged in sex work cannot be boiled down to oversimplified metaphors about supply and demand. The sex trade and the reasons people engage it are far more complicated than that.

If the true measure of success for legislation such as this is the increased safety and well being of people in the sex trade, then let the funds that would be used on this dangerous and ineffective database instead be directed towards women with little economic opportunity under our current system.

We do not support people engaged in sex work by making their job more dangerous. We support them by increasing their access to safety, support, and choice.

The bottom line is that this database would endanger women and disproportionately impact vulnerable workers who are migrants, transgender, and/or people of color.

If you care about violence against women, immigrant justice, workers rights, or economic sustainability then please do not pass HB 431.

Thank you again for this opportunity to offer testimony against HB 431. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Blyth Barnow
Ohio Harm Reduction Faith Manager
Faith In Public Life
bbarnow@faithinpubliclife.org
440-220-2090