



**Testimony on Senate Bill 23
Before the House Health Committee
The Hon. Derek Merrin, Chair
By Karen Rainey, AAUW/Ohio Advocate
March 26, 2019**

Chairman Merrin and members of the committee:

The American Association of University Women has long supported women and their right to choose an abortion, something denied by S.B. 23 being heard before this committee today.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Roe V. Wade* in 1973, women have had the right to control their own bodies should they have an unplanned pregnancy. The reasons women seek this last resort to avoid having to deliver and rear a child they did not plan for are quite varied. In this recent decade we have seen fewer abortions as women have had better access to birth control to prevent pregnancy, but in extreme circumstances women may see this procedure as essential. Perhaps they are having trouble finding enough food and/or shelter to sustain themselves, perhaps struggling with mental health issues where potent drugs they ingest are the only way for them to stay competent and reasonably healthy, or because of usage of illicit drugs. In the worst case scenario, a woman may have been raped by someone who could be a family member . . . a family member she may have to face daily with her baby as part of an already dysfunctional family unit. These are circumstances and a world that most people would not want to bring a baby into, as the child will most likely stay with the mother and experience the same battle with the world forced on the mother, often repeating the cycle of despair.

And we should not assume, as this bill does, that there can be no abortion once there is a heartbeat because a child will necessarily be born alive and healthy. With no exceptions for a young girl or woman, no matter how the child was conceived, this intrusion is the ultimate in government interference in a person's life. If a man could become pregnant, we ask "would we have the same rule....that the state and male-dominated legislature knows best even when they have no idea of the circumstances?" Women have finally obtained the right to vote, to inherit property, to hold office, yet this potential government intrusion into one of the most difficult, personal and life-changing decisions of a woman's life, still seems to be within the control of strangers, legislators who do not know, nor wish to know, her dire circumstances or the lifetime of follow-on care of the baby.

We wish for a good quality of life for all women, stabilized by effective family planning. We hope this committee might herald a new, more thoughtful and less intrusive age, in which women are not only assisted with food, shelter and healthcare, but also family planning and abortion if the woman herself deems it essential. We believe that sex education for both boys and girls and encouragement of birth control make more sense.

Your refusal to vote for this bill will help women who are in circumstances often larger than they are able to deal with, sometimes because of rape or other violence. Girls and women can begin to heal themselves so we can say that pregnancy is a planned and joyful event, not a punishment in these extreme cases intrusively levied by government.

We respectfully ask that you vote against this bill.

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy and research. AAUW, founded in 1881, is open to all graduates who hold an associate or higher degree from a regionally accredited college or university. In principle and practice, AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership.