

David Bell
Senate Bill 23 – Six-Week Abortion Ban
Opponent Testimony
Ohio House Health Committee
March 26, 2019

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Boyd, and Members of the Ohio House Committee,

My name is David Bell, and I am here to oppose Senate Bill 23, the six-week abortion ban, and Senate Bill 27, the Medical Tissue Disposal Bill. I am an environmental lawyer, and have lived and voted for the past 40 years in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. People think of northeast Ohio as some kind of liberal enclave, but I have to tell you that it is a diverse, energetic, fascinating, ever-changing and playful place, where great work gets done. We often disagree with each other, often about politics, and mostly without being too disagreeable about it. The Cleveland Heights public schools, as well as many other systems in northeast Ohio, teach children to respect each other, that everyone's opinion matters, and that everyone deserves to be heard. That focus on respect is a legacy which should be expanded across this state. And throughout this legislature.

Senate Bill 23 purports to respect lives, but in fact it will have exactly the opposite effect. By prohibiting all abortion before the time that many women even know they are pregnant, it precludes women from obtaining medical advice and treatment that they may need. This bill disrespects women. It disempowers women. It treats women as simply a disembodied organic vessel whose only purpose is to carry a fetus to term, if the fetus should survive that long. Nowhere does this legislation address the medical needs of women, except to dishonor those needs.

No doubt this committee will hear today numerous stories of how an abortion saved one or another woman's life, a saving that would be impossible under the draconian legislation of Senate Bill 23 before you. No doubt this committee will hear today numerous stories of how an abortion early in a pregnancy allowed one or another woman to escape the trap of unintended pregnancy, and its debilitating effect on the ability to live one's life. Again, preservation of that woman's ability to live life would be impossible under the draconian legislation of Senate Bill we before you.

In focusing only on the fetus, this legislation would cause untold harm to women across this state. And that is the inherent problem with a legislature trying to regulate specific medical

decisions. None of the members of this legislature are competent to make medical decisions for any other human being. Even the doctors among you are not personally treating all the women across this state who require medical care, and therefore are not competent to make medical decisions for the women affected by this legislation. Legislation needs to be sufficiently generic that it can be implemented without harming women. That is the first rule of the Hippocratic oath that doctors (and nurses) take – to do no harm. Well, this legislation harms women. There is no balancing here of harm between fetus and adult women. Under this legislation's approach, the needs of the woman do not matter. Only the fetus counts.

At least until that fetus is born. Then that critter is on his or her own. If this legislature ever adhered to the Ohio Supreme Court rulings about the unconstitutionality of Ohio's system for funding public schools, every child in the state might be able to learn to respect the opinions of others. Perhaps one of the reasons we are required to come here today is the result of Ohio failing its citizens on education, as well as on health care. We all deserve better.

Any woman is free to choose to carry a fetus to term, if that is her religious tradition. Those who have a different religious tradition, such as those who believe that women's lives matter as much or more than the potential life outside the womb of a fetus, have a constitutional right to adhere to their religious traditions, too, a right that this legislation would abrogate. Please drop any further consideration of this abhorrent legislation.

As to SB 27, the Medical Tissue Disposal Bill, it is at best a solution in search of a problem. How many women who have had an abortion asked for the ability to choose between burial and cremation, as opposed to standard tissue disposal regimens? Any? Has any woman complained to this legislature that they were denied such an option following her abortion? Certainly, SB 27 does not solve a single problem for women who have had an abortion. Instead it forces an unnecessary choice on her, at a time when she is most vulnerable. This is bullying of women who have had an abortion, for the benefit solely of those who have NOT had an abortion. It is beneath the dignity of the great State of Ohio to bully its citizens on behalf of other citizens. This legislation, too, disrespects women, and should not be enacted into law.

For the reasons given, I am vigorously opposed to both SB 23 and SB 27, and ask that every member of this committee respect women by voting no on each of them. Should any of the committee have questions, I will be pleased to respond in writing.

