

Opponent Testimony on Senate Bill 23
House Health Committee
on behalf of the National Council of Jewish Women
Tuesday, March 26, 2019

My name is Cheryl Pentella and I am the former president, and advocacy chair of the National Council of Jewish Women, Columbus, and the former state policy advocate NCJW. We are an organization of 90,000 members and supporters across the country and 2500 members and supporters in Ohio, dedicated improving the quality of life for women, children and families through community service and advocacy efforts to advance social justice. Women's health is a critical focus for us, and we have actively worked at the state and federal levels to improve healthcare access, defend reproductive justice and reduce infant and maternal mortality. We strongly believe that a woman's right to reproductive choice is an essential component of a healthy community.

The Turnaway Study, a longitudinal study conducted by the University of California, San Francisco, from 2010-2015, examined the effects of unintended pregnancies on women's lives and found that women denied a wanted abortion who have to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term have four times greater odds of living below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In addition, women denied abortion are:

- More likely to experience serious complications from the end of pregnancy including eclampsia and death.

Another important part of the Turnaway Study, reported in the Journal of Pediatrics in October 2018, found that denying women a wanted abortion has negative developmental and socioeconomic consequences for their existing children. In fact, from 6 months to 4.5 years after their mothers sought abortions, existing children of women denied abortions had lower mean child development scores (adjusted β -0.04, 95% CI - 0.07 to -0.00) and were more likely to live below the Federal Poverty Level (aOR 3.74, 95% CI 1.59-8.79) than the children of women who received a wanted abortion.

For these reasons and more, we are strongly opposed to Senate Bill 23, which would prevent an abortion before most women even know they are pregnant—and urge legislators not to spend our state's limited resources defending a bill that is unconstitutional.

Instead, we believe our taxpayer dollars should be spent in areas that have been proven to reduce unintended pregnancies – including better access to prenatal healthcare as well as reproductive healthcare such as access to contraceptives and comprehensive sex education.

Ohio continues to have one of the highest rates of infant mortality in the country, specifically among African American babies. If we truly care about children, we should be spending our dollars on preventing those deaths – many of which have been caused by a lack of access to reproductive health care and prenatal care.

NCJW also opposes this bill from a faith standpoint. We strongly believe that a woman's right to reproductive choice is a fundamental element of our religious liberty. The Constitution guarantees everyone in the United States the right to practice their own religion –and ensures that government cannot interfere with the practice of it. Yet, the six-week abortion ban is a violation of Judaism's own belief system which dictates that when it comes to reproduction, the health and life of a mother always come before the potential life of a fetus. Jewish sources explicitly indicate that if the continuation of the pregnancy might imperil the life or health of the mother, abortion is not only allowed, it is required. And health does not just mean a medically life-threatening condition – it also encompasses a woman's mental health and well-being. We understand and respect that every religion has its own belief systems around the issues of abortion. Freedom of religion means freedom **from** religion. Therefore, we do not believe that another's religious beliefs on this issue should be allowed to supersede our own.

Polls consistently show that 7 in 10 Americans support legal access to abortion. This very personal medical and life-altering decision is something that should be made by a woman, her family, her doctor and her clergy - if she chooses to include them. It is not a decision that should be made by legislators.

For these reasons, National Council of Jewish Women strongly opposes Senate Bill 23. It is time for lawmakers to stop interfering with our right to religious freedom and the private lives of women and families, and instead focus on policies that will support healthy communities and pregnancies.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

National Council of Jewish Women Cleveland) inspired by Jewish values to advance social and economic justice for all women, children and families.

*National Council of Jewish Women Cleveland
26055 Emery Road
Warrensville Heights OH 44128
216-378-2204
www.ncjwcleveland.org*