

March 23, 2019

Chairman/woman, Vice Chair, Ranking Member and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Jessica Cunningham and I live in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am a wife, a mother to two beautiful daughters, small business owner, and former patient of Planned Parenthood.

I would like to start off by saying that places like Planned Parenthood not only serve Ohio's most vulnerable, but also young girls who are fortunate enough to have loving parents, grow up in nice, middleclass neighborhoods, and attend private schools. Those of us who are handed promise rings and put through abstinence courses. As one of those girls, I found refuge in Planned Parenthood. They provided me with safe sex education and a place to ask questions without judgement. I continued to be a patient there throughout my college years because I did not have healthcare insurance. They provided me with affordable testing, birth control, and access to Plan B.

In my last year of college, I found myself unexpectedly pregnant because I had made a mistake with my birth control doses. Due to plantation bleeding, which I mistook for a period, I didn't know I was pregnant until I was eight weeks along. I took a test with Planned Parenthood and they confirmed my pregnancy. I will never forget when they called me and my now husband into the room to ask what I wanted to do. It wasn't necessarily the right time for me, but I believed it was the right guy. I was terrified, but after discussing all of my options, I decided to keep my pregnancy. The nurse gave me a hug and told me everything was going to be okay. I honestly credit Planned Parenthood for supporting me to have the beautiful family I have today. I often wonder where I would be without their help and guidance. They gave me options – and most importantly they gave me choice.

Recently, Republican lawmakers successfully blocked funding to Planned Parenthood – not allowing them to participate in Ohio initiatives targeting sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy, sexual violence, and cancer screenings. As a result, there will be more unplanned pregnancies – not to mention spread of sexually transmitted disease and late cancer diagnoses. HB 258 will not only eliminate a woman or child's right to choice, but it will force a woman or child who has been a victim of rape, sex trafficking, or incest to carry a pregnancy against her will. HB 258 decides that women are just vessels to carry babies, that our lives do not matter, and that my daughters' lives do not matter. I am here today because HB 258 is an attack on my rights and the rights of my daughters as women, as human beings, and as Americans. I ask that you consider my testimony and vote NO on the dangerous HB 258 so that my girls can grow up in an environment that offers them freedom, opportunity, and choice.

I am happy to answer any questions that the committee members might have. Thank you again for the chance to testify.

Jessica Cunningham