

Opponent Testimony

Topic: SB 23

Ohio House Health Committee

Hearing Date: March 26, 2019

Submitted by: Rev. Dr. Marian Stewart

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Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Manning, and Ranking Member Boyd,

My name is Rev. Dr. Marian Stewart, and I speak in opposition to Senate Bill 23.

Yesterday morning, I experienced a youth-led worship service. They had written music, composed readings, and prepared reflections. I am always curious about what they will say and I am always surprised and amazed by their insight and wisdom.

In some ways, the younger generation is far ahead of the rest of us. The youth spoke about community and common ground and how our assumptions limit us. One teen in particular spoke about what it means to accept each other regardless of differences. They told a story of how during 3rd grade, a classmate asked about religious beliefs. There were some similarities, and a few differences. The classmate decided they could no longer be friends. He was kind and well-meaning, but differences in personal belief could not be tolerated. Eventually, the friendship ended. The lesson this youth took from that experience was intriguing. They gleaned that we have become too dependent on common ground as a criterion for connection.

As a minister, I wonder about how this concept of common ground affects how we see one another. Our country and our politics have driven us into corners and it is impossible to see the 'other' behind our own beliefs. We are reactionary and dismissive within a moment's notice of differences. We ignore any capacity we have for loving one another beyond what we may or may not share in common.

I have tried to reach beyond this veil of common ground to assume best intentions and see if there is something that we share underneath our public stances. Here is what I've learned:

- We all have the need to love and to be loved.
- We all desire the best for ourselves, our children, and our families.
- And, we all hope that difficult situations will never come our way.

When my friend, let's call her Amy, was pregnant with her first child, she was elated. Her younger sister was also pregnant with her first. There was much celebration. But testing gave

Amy bad news. The baby had a heartbeat, but its brain was not developing. She had a choice: abort the fetus at 19 weeks or carry what would be a tragic stillborn to term. Amy and her husband had a profoundly difficult decision to make. There was no hope for the baby. The only choice was whether or not Amy had to carry what would be a dead baby in her body for another 20 weeks. The outcome would not be different, only the suffering.

Amy and her husband chose to abort the pregnancy. Because the procedure was done safely and legally, a few years later, Amy gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

Carrying a brain-dead fetus for 20 more weeks inside her body would be the only option under SB23. For the next 140 mornings, Amy would have to get up each morning knowing that the fetus in her belly would die. She'd have to face friends at work and strangers who wondered why she cried when they offered congratulations. The belly bump and fetal heartbeat did not tell the full story or even hint at the pain or the tragedy.

SB23 is inhumane and immoral. It tells Amy, we don't care about you.

Beyond our beliefs, I believe our real common ground is compassion. It is not seeing how fast we can divide ourselves into camps that leave no room to see each other's joy or pain. None of us wants to be in extraordinarily difficult situations. But they happen. To us. To our friends. To our families.

We should not be at a point in our society where the youth sharing their stories on Sunday will face a world where coat hangers, shared metal blades, and tummies as punching bags once again become the only methods for reproductive healthcare. We all wish for a perfect world where no woman or family faces hard decisions, but when they do, the grown-up and civilized thing to do is give options and let the medical professionals and their patients make the best choices for that particular situation.

Each of you is a leader, elected to lift up what we have in common – beyond our individual beliefs. You represent all of us and our needs, including full access to safe and legal reproductive health care when we find ourselves in difficult situations filled with pain and heartache.

Lead with compassion. Lead with love. Lead for ALL of us, regardless of your belief or our situation.

SB23 creates a common law that ignores complexities. It is a blunt law that lacks the care and love we all need. It treats everyone by a set of personal beliefs – yours – that drive us further apart. It imprisons women and their healthcare providers when they most need our support.

I believe you are well-meaning so why not give us a law that pulls us, and our difficulties, together? SB23 is about heartbeat, but it doesn't have heart or compassion. And for my friend Amy, it doesn't even have a brain.

I ask you to create a larger vision that includes all of us, at all times. Vote against HB23.

Thank you. Are there any questions?