

## **Opponent Testimony**

Topic: SB 23 (6-Week Abortion Ban)

House Health Committee, Room 017

Hearing Date: March 26, 2019

Submitted by: Rev. Joan Van Becelaere

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### **Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Manning, and Ranking Member Boyd:**

I am Rev. Joan Van Becelaere, Executive Director of the statewide nonprofit, Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio. Many people have come already to witness against the six-week abortion ban, and I am here today to oppose it as well.

I must admit that I am old enough to remember the 1960's and what happened to some of my teenage friends faced with unwanted pregnancy. I remember, which is why I know that a 6-week ban imposes a deadline long before most young women even know they are pregnant. I remember which is why I know that this ban will not stop abortions — if that is our goal.

It will only serve to send us back to the horrors of 60 years ago. Rich women will travel to other states, and middle class and poor women who feel they desperately need to stop an unwanted pregnancy will seek out health-threatening back alley clinics or fumble with dangerous self-induced abortions.

I remember, which is why I plead with you to not push us backward to the horror-filled days of coat hangers in the basement. Ending an unwanted pregnancy should be a safe procedure, with this deeply personal decision made by a woman in consultation with her family and doctor, and I believe, a spiritual guide who honors her faith commitments and moral agency.

I believe that, at a foundational level, most of us here would like to see a world where abortions are reduced. Safe but reduced. And during these hearings, we've heard different policy professionals and social scientists testify that the most efficient and effective way to reduce abortions is to stop unwanted pregnancies. We spend a lot of time talking about how to deal with abortion — rather than talk about the root cause — unwanted and unsafe pregnancies — and how to prevent them.

If our goal is to stop unwanted pregnancies, we already know a number of effective and efficient policy ways to do that. We can offer comprehensive sex education, make contraceptives widely and cheaply available; guarantee equal pay, paid family leave, quality affordable health care, child care, and a living minimum wage. We can make sure that we no longer turn a blind eye to rape, incest, and the trafficking of girls and young women.

These things we can do — if we have the will — and if we really want to end unwanted pregnancies. If that is our real goal.

But abortion is more than a question of policy and health care and economics. It is a question of religious worldviews and values and freedom of religion. I fear that some of us might want to guarantee that our particular religious worldview should dominate reproductive decisions in our country, regardless of the diversity of religious traditions we see in our pluralistic society. I fear that we are trying to take lessons from those strife-torn countries where religious authorities freely impose their single version of judgmental religious law on everyone. I recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 7: 1-2 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”

Today, women in Ohio are facing a policy that attacks our fundamental right to make decisions about our own bodies and futures — free from the fear of punishment, shame, and stigma. In SB 23, we are moving further and further away from the religious values that recognize women’s **worth and dignity** and closer and closer to merciless subjugation and judgement.

The 2nd chapter of the Epistle of James tells us “no mercy will be shown those who are without mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Christian, Jewish and other religious teachings demand that we love our neighbors and treat them with the same consideration and mercy we would treat ourselves. It does not sanction subjugating a neighbor’s rights in order to promote one’s own economic or political or even religious agenda. Matthew 7:12 says: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

SB 23 runs counter to majority support in the U.S. for reproductive rights — 58% of us actually, as noted in a 2018 Pew Foundation study. And this ban runs counter to the opinion of a majority of practicing people of faith, as seen in an extensive Public Religion Research Institute study last year. This study found that the majority of religious people across America’s Christian denominations today support the legal right to choose abortion — **even if they personally would not choose abortion for themselves.**

**Let me repeat that. A majority of people of faith support a woman’s right to choose, even if they personally would not choose abortion for themselves.**

The SB 23 attack on women’s rights contradicts what our many different faith traditions teach us about compassion, love, and fairness that is due to all people. Policies that shame, punish, stigmatize, and deny women’s basic rights as human beings take us all backward, putting our social and spiritual well-being at risk. While some may believe that ultimate salvation comes from divine grace, we also have a responsibility to strive for human laws that bring us closer to Beloved Community. SB 23 moves us in the very opposite direction.

Please vote against this bill.

I would be happy to answer any questions the committee members may have.