

Ryan Tillery
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,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ryan Tillery. I have called Ohio home for 26 of my 28 years. I'm a recent college graduate and I currently reside in Cincinnati. I'm also an abortion doula and I'm here today to voice my opposition to Senate Bill 23.

Last year, I joined the abortion doula program in Cincinnati. As a volunteer abortion doula, I am with clients before, during, and after their abortions, at their request. I consider it a privilege when clients allow me to hold space for them. "Holding space" for someone means I am present solely for them, to witness without judgment, and support them, if wanted. I've held hands, wiped tears, clipped back stray hairs, looked at pictures of their children, comforted, calmed, provided quiet company, and listened to their stories. Clients and I have laughed and cried together and have even sung songs together.

My clients have taught me so much during my time as an abortion doula. They've broken every stereotype of people who get an abortion that exists. I've sat with people of varying ages, races, ethnicities, sexual orientation, and gender identities. My clients come from different educational backgrounds, socioeconomic backgrounds, and family structures. Many of them have long term partners and the majority of my clients have children. Each client is so different from the next, but there is one thing they all have in common— that this decision is completely their own.

Each time I leave a doula shift, I think to myself, "If they could only hear their stories." I wish you could meet the young woman, already a mother despite taking every precaution, without a support system, who wouldn't have been able to support her child and herself had she continued the pregnancy. Or the married mother of two and cancer survivor who, along with her partner, could not support another child financially, physically, or mentally. Or the woman who, because of the lack of available options in her hometown, had to organize transportation and time off of work to allow enough time to travel to Cincinnati multiple times, have her appointments, wait the required 24 hours, have her procedure, travel back, and have a day to recover—none of which fit within a 6 week timeframe. Or the mother who so desperately wanted another child that she had her tubal ligation reversed only to be told by her doctor she most likely wouldn't survive the pregnancy. She told me if it had just been her, she would have accepted the risk, but she couldn't risk leaving her children parentless. When I think about it further, I realize everyone already has met my clients because, as the saying goes, "everyone loves someone who's had an abortion". And as an abortion doula, I'm lucky enough to love a lot of people who have had one.

I have seen firsthand how vital this medical care is. None of my clients deserve to be criminalized for accessing necessary healthcare. None of the providers I volunteer alongside deserve to be prosecuted for providing necessary medical procedures. Senate Bill 23 would jeopardize the health and wellbeing of my clients and threatens our autonomy.

I ask you to consider my testimony and, most importantly, my future clients, and vote no on this dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Ryan Tillery