

April 1, 2019

**Testimony of Elizabeth Brown  
Columbus City Council President Pro Tempore  
Senate Bill 23**

Chairman Merrin, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Health Committee, my name is Elizabeth Brown, and I am the President Pro Tempore of Columbus City Council. I am here to testify against SB 23, as a policymaker, a mother, and a person who cares deeply about family and child welfare.

For the last several years, the City of Columbus has engaged in community-wide efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of women and babies. Via our anti-infant mortality initiative, Celebrate One, we are taking on the most significant factors that contribute to Columbus's infant mortality rate by reducing premature births, eliminating sleep-related deaths, and connecting the disconnected to resources. We do this through a focus on expanding access to and enrollment in evidence-based home visiting, increasing neighborhood-based safe sleep ambassador training, and encouraging early access to quality prenatal care.

Thanks in part to this important work, in 2018 more Franklin County babies lived to celebrate their first birthdays and the infant mortality rate continued to drop across all populations. We have seen a 23 percent decrease in the infant mortality rate since 2011: from 9.6 to 7.5 per 1,000 live births. Despite this progress, we still confront an overall infant mortality rate that is higher than the national rate in the United States, as well as a persistent and unacceptable racial disparity that we must continue to address – African American mothers still experience an infant mortality rate that is 2.5 times higher than white mothers in Franklin County.

Throughout this work right here in our community, in Ohio's own statewide efforts, and through consensus by experts around the country, it is clear that the largest contributing factor to infant deaths is maternal health. The bottom line is that babies are more likely to live to their first birthdays if their mothers have a lifetime of good health care and health.

Therefore, we are doing more each year to increase women's health and combat infant mortality. After our progress thus far, we cannot afford to turn backward.

That is part of what concerns me about Senate Bill 23. This bill would essentially eliminate access to abortion in Ohio. This would work directly against our broader goals of improving women's and infants' health because abortion access is an important component of women's comprehensive health care. Research in states across the country has shown unequivocally that



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the more abortion restrictions a state has, the worse health outcomes that state has for women and children.

Instead, let's invest together as a state in reducing unwanted pregnancies and promoting the success of all families. That starts with comprehensive sex education in our schools and increased access to contraceptive services, but it also means quality affordable childcare and other measures to support working families.

I strongly oppose this bill and urge a no vote.



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