

Helen C. Geyer, Esq.
Senate Bill 23 – Six-Week Abortion Ban
Opponent Testimony
Ohio House Health Committee

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee. Thank you for reading my testimony regarding Senate Bill 23.

I am submitting testimony today for my mother, who was the first woman in her family to attend college and to get a job to support herself. When she married my father in 1945, however, she quit her job and became a housewife and mother to six children because it was expected of her. She loved her family and was proud of her children, but she was never entirely at peace with giving up her autonomy and becoming entirely financially dependent on my father. She chose her life, but her choices were limited by society in ways none of us here today would impose on our daughters and granddaughters. Obviously, abortion was as illegal then as you are contemplating making it today, but had she suffered an unwanted pregnancy, being white and well-off, she could have gotten one safely, if not legally.

The circle of her choices was too limited.

My mother taught her daughters the importance of education and financial autonomy and encouraged us get educated. All six of us have advanced degrees – four Ph.D.'s, one M.D., and me, a J.D. While my sisters and myself have gotten married and had children, we all learned that lesson well. None of us gave up our careers to have families. All of us could have left those marriages if necessary and remained financially solvent. These opportunities did not weaken our devotion to our children or the bonds of our marriages. They strengthened them. And when I was 15, Roe v. Wade legalized abortion throughout the nation.

The circle of our choices has become wider.

That circle of choice now includes a woman's right to decide if she will get pregnant, and if she will remain pregnant.

When I was in my early 20's, I got pregnant, despite using birth control. My fiancé and I were not ready to start a family. We discussed our options, and I decided to have an abortion, with which he agreed. It was not a snap decision. It was not taken lightly. We wanted a family in the future, but we were not prepared to move that timeline forward considerably. We were confident and at peace that we were doing the right thing. So I made the choice. As was my right. And I have never regretted it, not for *one split second*.

That was barely 10 years after Roe, in Pennsylvania. There were no anti-choice protesters. None of the legislation that has been passed since then requiring parental consent, waiting periods, the dissemination of medical misinformation, or invasive procedures had been passed yet. No clinics had been forced to close by absurd regulations that have no relation to medical necessity and are purely designed to put clinics out of business. No abortion clinics had yet been fire-bombed, no doctors had yet been murdered. Clinics were relatively plentiful, so I only had to travel 10 minutes from my house, and it was relatively inexpensive, because none of the factors that have caused the cost of abortion to skyrocket were yet in place.

It was simply treated as what it was and still is: *health care*. Straightforward, matter-of-fact, but very compassionate, health care. I am to this day extremely grateful for the dedication and compassion shown to me by that clinic. I was fully aware that I was terminating a potential life and a potential future. I wept for both during the procedure as the nurse held my hand. But I also knew in the very core of my being that I was doing the right thing.

Now some of you are seeking to shrink the circle of choice once again; to restrict the limits of choice to fit your own ideas of how far the circle should extend for women. I know many of you disagree

with the decision that I, and so many other women, have made and will continue to make in the future. Although the restrictions under consideration today will not affect life personally, I am testifying in memory of my mother, for that younger me who received the health care she needed without harassment, for my daughter, for my nieces, and for all the women who are already suffering because of the restrictions on reproductive freedom already in place in Ohio, and who will undoubtedly suffer further if you pass this one.

Most of all, I am testifying in the hope that my story can help to refute in your minds the stereotypes that I know those who oppose abortion rights often believe about women who choose abortion. My husband was raised with strong pro-life views and heard all the stereotypes growing up. You know what I'm talking about – that women who get abortions are irresponsible; that we use abortion as birth control; that we are godless; that we just want to keep our figures; that we are selfish; that we are willful murderers, that we are somehow manipulated into having abortions when we don't really want them, and that having an abortion irreparably damages us psychologically.

Before voting on this bill, you need to know that those things could not be further from the truth. We are thoughtful, spiritual people. We are not your enemies. We are your wives, your sisters, your daughters, and your friends. We are citizens of this nation, just like you, and we have the right to make this choice as and when we deem fit. Do not make that choice more difficult, more stressful, and more painful than it already is.

The women of Ohio unequivocally claim the right to control our reproductive lives, and *we insist upon it*. And we are legion. If you pass this bill, you are plainly stating to the women of Ohio that our lives are under *your* control, that *you* get to decide how far our leashes may extend, that *you* know best. You do not have that right. My mother, my sisters, and women and men of good will did not struggle to expand the circle only to stand by quietly as laws like this one seek to retract it. This bill is wrong. It is cruel. It is cynical. It is a travesty, and it is my fervent hope that you will vote against it. Thank you.

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