

Good afternoon, Chairperson Merrin, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the Health committee. My name is Jessica Roach. I am the Chief Executive Officer of Restoring Our Own Through Transformation - also known as ROOTT.

Our organization is a Black Women led, Reproductive and Birthing Justice organization dedicated to addressing the Black Maternal and Infant Health crisis through direct service, policy, advocacy, and education that centers the voices and needs of Black families.

What is unique about our organization is that our values drive our full spectrum approach toward reproductive health care, specifically as it pertains to Black Families, and our lived experiences.

ROOTT also places a heavy emphasis on addressing the institutional and structural policies and deficit driven health communications that have caused the adverse consequences revealed through recent analysis of the social determinants of health.

Reproductive Justice is often co-opted and siloed into a narrow frame of the pro-abortion lens. That is a misrepresentation. At ROOTT, Our tenants are clear, we believe in the right to autonomy, the right to choose how, where, when, and IF we create a family, the right to define family for ourselves, and the basic human right to

environments social structure and institutions that foster safety and self sustainability within our communities.

As a Black Woman, with clinical experience as a nurse and as a Public Health expert in Family Planning, Maternal & Infant Health, as a Perinatal Support provider of Doula services, AND as a mother, I stand here in front of you today in opposition to Senate Bill 23, with two, distinct points for consideration.

First; public policy and/or legislation based in non - accurate medical information is dangerous and does not allow for informed decision making by the patient, which is a direct violation of a patients' rights.

While any legislation created that tries to dictate access to reproductive health care is a violation of patients' rights, to create a bill that in and of itself, prevents access to abortion after the detection of the first "heartbeat" is misleading, coercive, and not based in true, physiological embryonic development.

To be more direct, there is no science applied to the aforementioned point of access restriction, which means this legislation would be responsible for communicating information that is inaccurate to its constituents. Moreover, regardless of the moral argument or values that each individual holds, it is necessary that health communication be accurate and as unbiased - AND - that it is evidence based in scientific fact as it pertains to human growth and development.

Secondly, ROOTT's position as an institutional advocate for Black Families requires that we support our medical colleagues and legislative bodies with increasing their understanding of what reproductive justice means.

Understanding reproductive justice in Black communities means understanding and acknowledging our 400 year history of not only having our reproductive choices raped away - BUT also having those choices dictated to US by white male dominated legislative bodies and business equity stakeholder partners historically and even now in 2019. It was clear then and now that they did not, and in many ways still do not consider us human.

This systemically racist and oppressive approach is embedded throughout health communication, access to birth control and other forms of reproductive health care, access to opportunity, safety, and sustainability.

Senate Bill 23 is based upon an idea that plagues us of African descent, and in particular those with a heritage in America that began with enslavement; the idea that a privileged few have the right to ownership over our bodies, our children, and our decisions to do what is necessary to create a family we desire to have.

This bill is not pro-life. It is loosely pro-birth, but absent the sense of birthing justice. It does not consider the many variables impacting our decisions in order to sustain or empower our lives.

It does not speak to the already existing Black lives that are here and may have need for this resource. It does not care about the health and well-being of mothers and fathers. It merely allows for the opportunity to continue the civic disruption of the Black family unit by putting one of the most important family decisions at risk because it will does not allow for a consideration of the other factors.

Reproductive decisions made within the Black family should stay within the Black family.

These decisions are private and personal healthcare matters that require having all of the variables considered that those with socioeconomic privilege cannot understand. These types of decisions should be made in conjunction with a competent medical practitioner of each individual's choosing - with the ultimate decision being made by the family.

Our families and communities have been disrupted and destroyed by policy created over our 400 year timeline with absolutely no regard for our sanctity and it must stop.

This bill stands to disproportionately politically commoditize and criminalize Black bodies further. ROOTT respectfully demands that our voices be heard and centered in our care, and that all of you cast a NO VOTE against Senate Bill 23.

