

**Leah Pusateri**  
**HB 90 Opponent Testimony**  
**House Health Committee**

Good morning, Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, esteemed members of the Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee. My name is Leah Pusateri and I am a Community Education Manager with Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio and the Ohio Center for Sex Education. I am a seasoned educator, teaching comprehensive sex education to Ohio students for over a decade, I am a voter and I am a relentless and passionate advocate for creating positive, inclusive and engaging learning environments to help foster the growth, knowledge and social emotional wellness of our state's future: our young people. Thank you for the chance to speak to all of you today regarding my opposition to HB 90 and for your attention as I implore you to see why this mandate would be a sincere failure for our young people.

One promise I always make when I am educating is to provide fact-based and medically accurate information. I only answer questions when I am 100 % certain of my answer, and I never answer in a way that imposes my personal values and beliefs on students. This approach has helped build rapport and trust with young people and within the classroom. By providing fact based information, I show students I respect them, their ability to learn and the fact that they have values and beliefs of their own. As a classroom educator, I understand it is very important to honor every student's unique story. Stories that could include: religious beliefs, church communities, family values, peer relationships, the accomplishment they are most proud of, or even an experience that has most negatively impacted them. Each of our state's students has a need to be seen, with their vast and wide array of life experience. I know that providing them with comprehensive sexual health information that is rooted in fact, and not values and beliefs, helps me to do my best in recognizing all students.

HB 90 doesn't serve our diverse, multi-dimensional and exceptional young people. It creates a standard that is rooted in forcing a moral belief; a value coded educational experience that frankly, students will tune out. I assume many of you have met, interacted with, or are even currently parenting teenagers. What do the facts tell us, when it comes to what messaging they absorb and what messaging they ignore? Facts tell us: abstinence only education is a failure. It fails to delay the onset of sexual activity and it fails to address the universal truth: at some point in their lives MOST people will choose to have sex. By not providing information on HOW protection works, why it is important and how to obtain it, abstinence based education sets our young people up for failure. It doesn't serve the intended outcome of "achieving an abortion free society" HB 90 hopes to achieve. Reducing unintended pregnancy rates CAN be achieved by taking the large amount of money that would be spent on HB 90 and putting that money towards sexual health education that is proven to work AND overwhelmingly supported by parents across this country and that is comprehensive sex education.

HB 90 fails to address what the CURRENT reality is for the young people in our state, a state with a higher than national teen pregnancy average. The Center for Community Solutions, a non-partisan Ohio think tank, did research in the year 2017 on the overlap between STI infection rates and teen pregnancy rates throughout our state and the sex education that is happening in the areas with the highest rates of both. Should I ruin the surprise? When students are provided with no education at all OR only value laden, abstinence only education: they are STILL having sex and it ISN'T protected. It is sex that has the potential to result in unintended pregnancy, STI infection and has the potential to increase the abortions HB 90 so misguidedly proposes to try and stop.

Frankly, I don't align myself with the stated goals of HB 90. I don't agree with the notion that people who choose abortion don't understand the decisions they are making, or don't value the potential life that is developing. I certainly do not agree with creating taxing standards for our Health Department that do not align with national health standards or proven methods of prevention. I don't at all believe that telling young people to just say "no" to sex is at all effective in fostering in them an understanding of why it is imperative and safest for them to delay sex. Furthermore, as a proud member of Ohio's LGBTQ + community, I must say that HB 90's standards are very ignorant to the needs of Ohio's LGBTQ + young people.

BUT, if I am being empathetic to your cause I will tell you this: HB 90 isn't going to get you what you hope for. The kind of education myself and the other comprehensive sexual health educator's throughout our State provide, is the ONLY proven method of delaying the onset of sexual activity in our young people. And, that is based on fact, not personal values and opinion.

I speak not only for myself, but for the students all across our great state that depend on all of us to provide them with unbiased, fact based information: make the right decision and vote no on HB90. Thank you and I am happy to do my best to answer any questions you may have.