

REV. TERRY WILLIAMS TESTIMONY FOR APRIL 30, 2019
HOUSE HEALTH COMMITTEE HEARING ON HOUSE BILL 90

Chairman Merrin and other distinguished members of the House Health Committee,

My name is The Reverend Terry Williams. I am an Ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, and I currently serve as Lead Pastor of Orchard Hill United Church of Christ in Chillicothe. As a Christian pastor, I am called to ministries of preaching, spiritual care, faith formation, and teaching within my local congregation.

As a person tasked with teaching the tenets of faith to Christians in my context, I am always mindful of efforts by authorities and organizations within our state to impose their religious, ideological, or personal convictions on the people of my congregation within the public square. While it is certainly the right of every Ohioan to vigorously contend for their ideology and convictions within the greater public discourse in our state, it is another matter entirely when ideology and convictions are promoted using the resources of the state for the purpose of indoctrination or persuasion.

House Bill 90 in its current form does exactly that — it seeks to use the resources of our state to support the indoctrination of members of the public with an ideological perspective that is neither scientific nor sound. The bill itself states its aim clearly: to achieve an “abortion-free society.” No matter how sincerely held, this aim is ideologically driven and is not one shared by many religious communities and leaders within our state.

As a Christian pastor within the United Church of Christ, this stated aim of eliminating abortion healthcare services in our society runs counter to the religious values that my denomination has for many years proclaimed, lived, and cherished. Our congregants are morally free to choose the healthcare services that best meet their needs and which best achieve their moral and ethical aims — including forms of abortion healthcare services — and they should be allowed to continue in such freedom as their conscience and religious values allow without state-sponsored stigma, propaganda, and vitriol.

Abortion healthcare services are moral, ethical, and righteous options for people of faith and conscience to exercise in our state. Moralizing language and efforts to educate by synecdoche — that is, the provision of only portions of the whole truth instead of the whole truth itself — are an affront to the people of the State of Ohio and represent an abusive state-led attempt to persecute people who hold sincere religious beliefs that support abortion healthcare services as moral and just ways of protecting their health and living abundantly.

The radical attempts to silence abortion healthcare service providers in this bill show very clearly that the aim of the legislation is not to educate Ohioans fully about the development, growth, and humanity of the fetus. From the text of the legislation, it is apparent that the aim of House Bill 90

is to strategically cherry-pick educational materials from ideologically-incestuous sources that agree fully with the stated goal of the project before even being fully researched.

Surely if the goal of this project were to create a holistic, comprehensive, fully scientific scholarly offering, the authors of this legislation would not have to stipulate specific resources that cannot be consulted in the development of curriculum (ref. Sec. 3301.0730(A)). The restriction of resourcing for the development of this curriculum is akin to asking a doctor to provide care to a patient while only using a limited portion of their instruments, a limited portion of their academic resources, and a limited portion of their learned medical knowledge.

And let's be very clear: asking doctors to provide care to their patients while only using some of the methods available is precisely what the future "abortion-free society" envisioned by this bill looks like in practice. Limited information that leads to limited resources that leads to limited healthcare that leads to limited health outcomes all in the name of ideology masquerading as concern that seeks to directly oppose my religious freedom — this is the true aim of House Bill 90.

What alternatives might we envision if we would take off the blinders and consider all available resources — particularly those banned by this bill?

I, for one, envision a future where every child in Ohio receives comprehensive sex education — teaching that helps young minds fully understand their options for contraception, sexually transmitted infection prevention, and use of both pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis to combat HIV transmission.

I envision a future where educational curricula are not used as political weapons in the culture wars — where education can be rigorous, fearless, without bias, and freely exercised without preconceived outcomes and without ideological litmus tests.

And finally, I envision a future where the religious views of my church are not the target of lawmakers' ideological crusades — a future where people of religious conviction can freely exercise their civil right to abortion healthcare services without stigma from the statehouse, rancor from representatives, or shame from senators.

None of these visions for the future include embarrassing, draconian measures like House Bill 90. I encourage you to acknowledge the dangerous nature of this very flawed bill and refuse to cooperate with the dismantling of religious freedom in our state. I encourage you to oppose this bill in committee and to oppose any future efforts by the legislature to weaponize education in our state for ideological means.

Ohio's vibrant future will only come to be if you stand up today to protect educational integrity and our cherished religious freedoms; vote NO on House Bill 90.