

**Opponent Testimony on House Bill 297 State Income Tax Credit for Donations to Fake Women's Health Centers**

**Susan Reis on behalf of the National Council of Jewish Women**

Chairman Representative Derek Merrin; Ranking Minority Member Representative John Rogers:

My name is Janyce C. Katz. I am the former president, and current advocacy chair of the National Council of Jewish Women, Columbus, and the former co chair state policy advocate and former co chair national advocacy committee of NCJW. We are an organization of 90,000 members and supporters across the country and 2500 members and supporters in Ohio, dedicated improving the quality of life for women, children and families through community service and advocacy efforts to advance social justice. Women's health is a critical focus for us, and we have actively worked at the state and federal levels to improve healthcare access, defend reproductive justice and reduce infant and maternal mortality. We strongly believe that a woman's right to reproductive choice is an essential component of a healthy community.

We consider ourselves "pro life" because we are concerned about each and every individual, their health, their education, their opportunities and, yes, their right to control when they have children.

Those of us with financial resources can find ways to take care of our family's needs for health care, education and control over when they have children.

What you are proposing is not pro life, but is harmful to those of us with more limited resources.

H.B. 297 creates a state tax credit for donations to qualifying "pregnancy resource centers".

Where is the concern for the baby once the baby is born? Where is the concern for the health of mothers, not just to provide them diapers, but to make sure that the mother is able to bear a healthy child.

What regulations, what has been set up to make certain these centers actually give women the care they need? And, if the pregnancy could harm the woman if she continues to carry the baby, or if the baby is going to be born missing a brain or otherwise doomed to a short, painful life, what do these centers do to help the mother, to help the family and to help this child whose care will be quite costly for the short time that child lives?

The Turnaway Study, a longitudinal study conducted by the University of California, San Francisco, from 2010-2015, examined the effects of unintended pregnancies on women's lives and found that women denied a wanted abortion who have to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term have four times greater odds of living below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In addition, women denied abortion are:

- More likely to experience serious complications from the end of pregnancy including eclampsia and death.

Another important part of the Turnaway Study, reported in the Journal of Pediatrics in October 2018, found that denying women a wanted abortion has negative developmental and socioeconomic consequences for their existing children. In fact, from 6 months to 4.5 years after their mothers sought abortions, existing children of women denied abortions had lower mean child development scores (adjusted  $\beta$  -0.04, 95% CI -0.07 to -0.00) and were more likely to live below the Federal Poverty Level (aOR 3.74, 95% CI 1.59-8.79) than the children of women who received a wanted abortion.

Instead of creating a bad precedent with the tax credit, we believe our taxpayer dollars should be spent in areas that have been proven to reduce unintended pregnancies – including better access to prenatal healthcare as well as reproductive healthcare such as access to contraceptives and comprehensive sex education. We believe that tax dollars should be spent to help those families pay for medical care if they choose to continue a pregnancy when it is clear that the child will be born with life denying flaws. But, we believe that decision is a choice that should be made not by the state, but by the woman who has the complete and actual facts about her health and her baby's health given to her by qualified medical providers.

It is not clear that would happen if a woman has only the choice to go to one of these tax credit paid for medical centers.

Ohio continues to have one of the highest rates of infant mortality in the country, specifically among African American babies. If we truly care about children, we should be spending our dollars on preventing those deaths – many of which have been caused by a lack of access to reproductive health care and prenatal care.

NCJW also opposes this bill from a faith standpoint. We strongly believe that a woman's right to reproductive choice is a fundamental element of our religious liberty. The Constitution guarantees everyone in the United States the right to practice their own religion –and ensures that government cannot interfere with the practice of it. Yet, the six-week abortion ban is a violation of Judaism's own belief system which dictates that when it comes to reproduction, the health and life of a mother always come before the potential life of a fetus. Jewish sources explicitly indicate that if the continuation of the pregnancy might imperil the life or health of the mother, abortion is not only allowed, it is required. And health does not just mean a medically life-threatening condition – it also encompasses a woman's mental health and well-being. We understand and respect that every religion has its own belief systems around the issues of abortion. Freedom of religion means freedom **from** religion. Therefore, we do not believe that another's religious beliefs on this issue should be allowed to supersede our own.

Polls consistently show that 7 in 10 Americans support legal access to abortion. This very personal medical and life-altering decision is something that should be made by a woman, her family, her doctor and her clergy - if she chooses to include them. It is not a

decision that should be made by legislators. We believe that providing tax dollars and tax credits for medical care centers that may provide religious information as well as medical information that is not accurate or is misleading is wrong.

National Council of Jewish Women strongly opposes House Bill 297.

It is time for lawmakers to stop interfering with our right to religious freedom and the private lives of women and families, and instead focus on policies that will support healthy communities and pregnancies, real pro life actions.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

*National Council of Jewish Women Cleveland) inspired by Jewish values to advance social and economic justice for all women, children and families.*

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