

Rev. Terry Williams Testimony for November 12, 2019
Ohio House Ways and Means Committee Hearing on House Bill 297

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chairman LaRe, Ranking Member Rogers, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for taking time today to allow me to share testimony concerning House Bill 297.

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.

In addition to my work in the parish, I am a faith organizer with the Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and a member of Ohio Clergy for Choice, a group of clergy and religious leaders from across Ohio who support a person's ability to access a full range of reproductive health services, including safe and legal abortion.

It will come as no surprise to you that I do not support this legislation. For many of the same reasons you have undoubtedly already heard, I believe this bill to be a dangerous endorsement of a particular ideological industry in our state that serves neither women nor infants nor the general good of our state's public health.

Fake health centers like the ones House Bill 297 favors and funds are well documented as places where health misinformation thrives and dangerous deception masquerades as charitable concern.

Far from the helpful repositories of diapers and car seats that the bill's proponents cheerily reference, the centers that this bill seeks to lift to a privileged position in our state tax code are foxholes of fakery — the very front lines in a war that is being waged against medically accurate, comprehensive sexual education in favor of ideologically-driven lies about reproductive health that are harming our state.

The perfect marriage between anti-abortion zealotry and the mythology of abstinence-only sexual health education, the centers named in this bill seek to promote falsehoods about the risks of birth control medication, discourage the usage of condoms, and scare patients away from safe and legal abortion regardless of the negative health impacts of those ideologically-driven goals.

And now, after clearly documented evidence shows these centers engaging in work that leads to negative impacts on public health, the sponsors of this legislation want my tax dollars to pay for it all.

My tax dollars paying for lies about birth control medication.

My tax dollars paying for lies about condom effectiveness.

My tax dollars paying for lies upon lies upon lies about safe, legal abortion.

I think my tax dollars and the tax dollars of every Ohioan would be much better spent privileging a whole host of other organizations in our state — particularly organizations that don't promote dangerous, anti-public health lies.

Food banks throughout our state don't need to lie to their clients about the safety of eggplants; food banks simply help people get access to safe, delicious groceries.

Veterans mental health support networks don't need to lie to veterans about the usefulness of therapy; veterans mental health support networks go the extra mile to connect veterans with someone who can listen and provide them the care they desperately need.

And abortion clinics in Ohio — actual medical facilities that value medically accurate, all-options counseling for patients — have never needed to lie to patients about the risks associated with contraception, abortion, or childbirth; abortion clinics in Ohio provide necessary, life-saving medical care each and every day without any special state carve-out or ideologically-driven kickback.

There are thousands of better, more effective, more ethical ways for this committee to decide to spend Ohio taxpayer dollars than by enshrining one immoral industry in a privileged place within the Ohio tax code.

There are thousands of better, more effective, more ethical ways to accomplish the goal of supporting infants and new parents that don't require funding lies about medical science and reproductive health.

There are thousands of better, more effective, more ethical ways to support sexuality education and pregnancy support that actually teaches comprehensive sexuality education and that doesn't just outright lie about abortion.

Of those thousands of better, more effective, more ethical ways available to you as members of this committee, I pray you decide to take at least one of them and leave House Bill 297 where it belongs: on the cutting room floor where all useless paper and really bad ideas fall and fade. Please, use some common sense and vote NO on House Bill 297.

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