

Chair Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and members of the Ohio Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Shakti Rambarran, and I am a OH resident whose education and work is centered in the field of sexual and reproductive health. Currently, I'm getting my PhD in Social Psychology from Ohio University. I vehemently oppose the Medical Misinformation Act (SB 155) because it is predicated in deceit, is dangerous, and strips Americans of their freedom to make an informed choice. As such, I ask that you strike it down.

Sadly, this bill (and others like it) is partly rooted in a culture of secrecy and shame surrounding abortions which contributes to a lack of understanding surrounding who seeks abortions and why. So, to help demystify this, please allow me to share my own experience with you today.

I had an abortion. And it was, and continues to be, the decision that was undeniably right for me.

A little while back, I was on an IUD with an over 99% effective rate. I did all the check-ups, and was always commended by my doctors on being proactive with my health and taking whatever prevention steps I could to avoid things I wanted to - especially unintended and unwanted pregnancies. In many ways, I was doing "all the right things", and still, I got pregnant.

Fortunately for me, I had an overwhelming majority of things going in my favor that equipped me to seek the care I needed. I discovered my pregnancy very early on so there wasn't a fear that I wouldn't be able to get the services I needed — even if they took time (and spoiler: they did). Prior to having sex and prior to getting pregnant, I had easily spent hundreds of hours in deep personal thought as well as active, on-going conversations with my husband to determine what we felt would be the right decision for me as an individual, and us as a couple. I had a world-class masters' education on sexual and reproductive health from an Ivy League institution. We had enough disposable finances to cover the travel, procedure, the lodging - anything. I had countless pro-choice friends who openly spoke about abortions and never made anything surrounding them seem secretive or disgraceful. I even knew a few abortion providers who were willing to offer advice for all my options, walk me through any information that came up at doctors' appointments, and provide me with the comfort of a sounding board. In many ways, I had it all in my favor and so it should have been straightforward to get the care I needed and had a right to.

Yet, I still had some overwhelming challenges to deal with; challenges regarding an initial appointment with a medical provider who lied about my health risks and made me feel like scum; challenges regarding timely access to medical care; challenges regarding *extreme* sickness while pregnant.

Immediately after discovering my pregnancy, I made a same-day health care appointment to discuss next steps. Since my regular GP wasn't available, I had to meet with a random provider.

This provider was rude, impatient, judgmental, and knowingly lied to me about the potential risk of my pregnancy being ectopic and my fallopian tubes rupturing. Within a 15 minute appointment, they managed to shame me for becoming unexpectedly pregnant, express annoyance at my concerns around pregnancy and my confusion that my IUD had failed, scare me into thinking I could (and would) become infertile, and tried to guilt me into making a medical decision quickly so that they could wrap up the appointment and move on with their day. By the end of the session, I was having a full-blown panic attack. Even for someone who had a thorough education in this field, this provider and their lies still knocked me down. Had it not been for my friendships with an abortion provider who used science and fact to explain my risk, I would have felt pressured to make impulsive and potentially harmful medical decisions for myself. I left that one horrible appointment and sought out another provider who performed an ultrasound and confirmed that my pregnancy wasn't ectopic, my fertility wasn't at risk, and that I had time to decide what to do.

I knew OH required a consultation and 24 hour waiting period, so I immediately booked my first appointment (the consultation). That went well, and so I quickly made my next appointment. But, because I was in OH with too few providers and clinics to meet the demands of the state, I had to wait a week for the earliest appointment for the procedure itself. During that wait-time, I had started to experience nausea and started to become incredibly sick. I wasn't able to hold down an overwhelming majority of meals or even any kinds of drinks - not even water. I was throwing up bile multiple times a day, every day. To ease my nausea, doctors prescribed me nausea meds that they described as being "just a notch below what [they'd] give chemo patients". Yet, those didn't do anything. In fact, I couldn't keep even those in my system. I tried taking whatever vitamins and other medications to help but all my efforts were futile. I became alarmingly dehydrated and was on the verge of becoming hospitalized multiple times - but, I was concerned about high hospital bills and so, by luck and a lot of determination, I was able to keep down just enough water to prevent that from happening each time. Regardless, I was rapidly dropping weight. I spent my days weakly draped on our living room couch too sick to move unless it was to violently throw up but my focus was just getting my procedure.

When I arrived for my procedure, the providers first had to check that I had met the requirement of an OH law by opening and reading a document stating details of my pregnancy. Unfortunately, because of a "glitch in the system", the website wasn't showing that I had opened the aforementioned document — and so legally, the wonderful providers at Planned Parenthood weren't allowed to perform my abortion. I remember their frustration and sadness for me, as it was undeniable I had opened the document — I could tell them every last detail on it, but still they couldn't touch me despite how evidently sick and tired I was. Exhausted from being so sick, so weak, and feeling like my body wasn't my own, I remember breaking down crying in the office and saying I just needed to get this done.

So, they signed a statement attesting that I had opened and read the document (again) in front of their eyes, and we booked another appointment. The earliest one possible. Another week out.

And in that week, I continued to get even sicker and sicker. Vomiting bile more times a day, feeling my stomach was being painfully vacuum suctioned, and my body was the weakest it's ever been. It had been two weeks since when I discovered my pregnancy and I was still a few days away from my actual appointment. I continued to hover around a meager 100lbs -- which was unquestionably underweight for someone who is 5'4 and curvy. In those two weeks, I had dropped 10 lbs and doctors were concerned and convinced that such rapid weight loss (and the accompanying malnourishment) would only continue unless a serious intervention took place. Then finally, the day of my appointment came and there it was all but officially stated that I had hyperemesis gravidarum (a severe pregnancy complication characterized by extreme nausea, weakness, and dehydration). Luckily for me, once I went through with the abortion, my symptoms could go away almost immediately. And they did. Within an hour of my procedure, my nausea had completely disappeared and I was able to hold down 12oz of ginger beer and a tiny pack of saltine crackers. The first "meal" I had and kept down in two weeks. I remember crying tears of joy over what had seemed like such a major victory at the time. It felt like my body returned to me. And ever since that day, my body has continued to feel like mine — as it should.

My abortion is always something I have looked back on with utmost confidence and relief. I knew how much time and thought I had put into that decision, and how seriously I took the situation. It's not something I feel joy or excitement about, but it IS something I had never once felt a shred of doubt or regret over because I knew to my core that this was the right decision for me. This Medical Misinformation Act (and this false and bizarre goal of having an "abortion reversal pill") is predicated on this notion that people who seek abortions are making the wrong decisions, regretful decisions, and one which they must undo. This act isn't backed by science or facts; it's backed by a goal of stripping countless Americans of their freedom of choice. It directly puts patients in harm's way by preventing them access to information that they are owed and entitled to; that trained medical providers have a responsibility to provide, and that denies them of their freedom to make an informed choice.

I ask that you reject this anti-abortion and anti-science bill. It's unconstitutional. It's unethical. It's un-American.

Thank you.