

Opponent Testimony on House Bill 258
House Health Committee
Susan Reis on behalf of the National Council of Jewish Women
Wednesday December 6, 2017

Chairman Huffman and Ranking Minority Member Antonio:

My name is Susan Reis and I am the State Policy Advocate in Ohio for National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW.) We are an organization of 90,000 members and supporters across the country and 2500 members and supporters in Ohio, dedicated to social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children and families. One of our focuses at NCJW is women's health. Among other things, we work on issues of healthcare access, reproductive justice and infant and maternal mortality. From our work at NCJW we know that a woman's right to reproductive choice is an essential component of a healthy community - and a fundamental element of our religious liberty.

For these reasons and more, we are strongly opposed to House Bill 258, which would make it illegal for a physician to perform an abortion after six weeks, before many women even know they're pregnant--and urge legislators not to spend our state's limited resources of taxpayer dollars defending a bill that has already been proven unable to withstand a constitutional challenge.

Instead, we believe our taxpayer dollars should be spent in areas that have been proven to provide support for women and children's health – including access to prenatal healthcare, better access to reproductive healthcare such as fertility treatment and contraception, paid maternity leave and accurate, comprehensive sex education. Ohio continues to have one of the highest rates of infant mortality in the country, specifically among black women. 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.

NCJW is also concerned about this bill from a faith standpoint. 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 with no medical background.

For these reasons, National Council of Jewish Women strongly opposes House Bill 258.

It's 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, such as HB 248, which aims to offer comprehensive sex education for teens and full access to contraceptives for women.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

Susan Reis

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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