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Proponent Testimony: H.B. 258
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Thank you, Chairman Burke and Members of the Ohio Senate’s Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee.

I am Petra Wallenmeyer. I have called Ohio my home since 2014. I have my Master’s degree in chemistry from the Ohio State University, where I did research on the chemical mechanisms of DNA polymerases and also researched specific aspects of HIV RNA and how it interacted with viral proteins to be packaged into new virions. I currently work full time for the OSU Chemistry and Biochemistry Department, and part time at an international pregnancy helpline. I am currently waiting to be accepted into a second Master’s program so I can pursue my career in higher education.

This bill could affect *my* future chances of access to abortion. I would check off most of the boxes for reasons women seek an abortion if I found out I was pregnant tomorrow. Money would be an issue in taking care of a child. I have more education I want to complete. I’m unmarried. I’m young. I have career goals.

Now that I’ve stated my personal vested interest in this legislation, I want to make it clear: I am a proponent of this bill.

*Any* opponent or proponent of this bill, from average citizen to a state legislator, needs to first address the underlying question of the abortion issue: what is the preborn? If the unborn are not humans or if they are not valuable humans, then I would certainly agree with any opponent here that abortion should absolutely be legal for whatever reason and with no cut-off date.
But if the preborn are humans and are valuable, then ending their life to benefit other’s lives is a serious moral wrong and is a choice which should be restricted.

Scientifically, we know an individual human organism’s life comes into existence at fertilization (1-2). [I have a reference list to articles I am citing at the end of my written testimony] Is that life merely a cluster of cells, a bunch of tissue, a tumor-like growth? No. These statements are unequivocally, scientifically false. A human zygote, embryo, or fetus is an “organism” by any definition of the word, and an organism is very different than a mere cluster of cells or tissue. An organism is independent, self-repairing, and guides and directs *its own* growth and development along a genetically and epigenetically predetermined trajectory. A cell requires an organism to keep it alive and functioning. A cell is a part of a whole. An organism is the whole. I am a human organism.

But ultimately, science does not and cannot determine morality of actions. Science is a process used to explore and explain the world around us, but ultimately, the rightness or wrongness, the value or worthlessness of something or someone, cannot be determined by science, though our logical, rational, and philosophical claims to morality may be grounded in science.

Great. Science establishes a human organisms’ life begins at fertilization. Is that human life valuable, or disposable? Philosophically, there is no morally significant difference between the embryo I once was and the adult human I am today. I am essentially the same person, though matured, as I was 25.75 years ago in my mother’s uterus. Yes, as an embryo I was smaller, I was less developed, I was inside my mother’s body, and I was dependent on some outside source to keep me alive. But none of those criteria are good enough to say the embryo I used to be was not valuable— because all the criteria can be applied to various born humans or older preborn humans whom we would all think are valuable, no matter their size, level of physical or mental development, location, or dependency on something other than themselves for life (whether that’s a caretaker, medication, a donated organ, or a machine). If a human zygote, embryo, or fetus is not protected under the law as any other human organism is, that means the law reflects a belief that such a thing as *human non-persons* exists. And that is a dangerous belief. That belief has been and is still used to justify horrific acts of violence against born humans.

So, I would contend if I am essentially the same person today as I was when I was a zygote, then human life (at its earliest onset) must intrinsic value and based on that, basic human rights are for *all* humans.

* I believe every single person in this room is valuable because of what they *are*, not what they can *do*.

I also believe intentionally and directly ending the life of an innocent human is objectively wrong. This is exactly what elective abortion does.

I know what opponents to this bill are saying. I know the sensationalist headlines the media has been throwing around. The biggest arguments against the bill seem to be the following:

* the lack of exception for rape or incest
* the fact some women may not know they are pregnant by the time cardiac activity of the living human organism developing inside them is detectable
* women won’t be able to get medical care they need during a pregnancy
* and loss of bodily autonomy.

I want to address these issues briefly and explain why, though my personal access to abortion could be affected, I am still in favor of this bill.

First, the lack of an exception for rape or incest.

* The act of rape is horrible crime, and I do believe survivors should be given the support and encouragement they need to heal physically, mentally, and emotionally.
* Incest is taboo and is just as terrible an act as rape when it is nonconsensual.
* However, an act of great injustice and violence cannot condone or permit yet another act of injustice and violence, i.e., the ending of an innocent, vulnerable human life through the act of elective abortion.
* *Both* innocent human survivors of rape and/or incest must be helped.
* This bill will protect the life of a new, innocent human, even though they came into existence under dire circumstances.

Next, it is true some women do not know they are pregnant by the time an embryonic or fetal heartbeat can be detected.

* A transvaginal ultrasound can pick up embryonic cardiac activity as early as 6 weeks gestational age.
* A transabdominal ultrasound can pick up such activity around 7 weeks, but it can take as long as 8 weeks.
* Anecdotally, I can tell you, from the numerous calls I have taken as a pregnancy helpline consultant, many women suspect very quickly if they are pregnant and actually end up taking pregnancy tests too early for them to be accurate.
* Representative Hagan produced non-anecdotal evidence in her written and verbal testimony on December 4th detailing how the majority of women suspect very early on whether they are pregnant, they test quickly, and they decide on abortion quickly.
* However, I can certainly grant some women may not know they are pregnant very quickly, especially if they have irregular periods or are on hormonal birth control.
* However, how does my knowing whether or not I am pregnant speak to the morality of the act of elective abortion, which is the real issue here?
* The issue everyone should be discussing is not how far the deadline is after I know I’m pregnant, but is it morally permissible to electively end the life of an innocent, living, developing human organism?

Some women or medical providers are worried about women being able to get treatment for various health issues if this bill goes into effect. The media is making it seem like this would be the case. For example, Dr. Daniel Grossman, professor in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences at the University of California, San Francisco, said in a series of tweets about Ohio’s H.B. 258: “Prior to 6 weeks, it can be hard to tell if a patient has a complication, like an ectopic pregnancy -- a pregnancy developing outside the uterus. Bills like this keep me from caring for patients experiencing ectopic pregnancies & miscarriages. It’s the opposite of healthcare. Waiting to intervene on an ectopic pregnancy could put a patient at risk of having the ectopic rupture, or continuing a painful miscarriage. It could put a patient at risk of heavy bleeding an infection, even if the embryo has a ‘heartbeat’.”

* This statement and those like it show a complete lack of understanding of what this bill says
* This bill grants 2 major exception to the restriction of abortion after cardiac activity is detected.
* First, an exception is granted through section 2919.195, which allows a doctor to perform any medical procedure to, “prevent the death of the pregnant woman or to prevent a serious risk of the substantial and irreversible impairment of a major bodily function of the pregnant woman”
* Secondly, Section 2919.191 prefaces the restrictions by saying “Sections 2919.192 to 2919.195 of the Revised Code apply only to intrauterine pregnancies.”
* There is nothing in this bill which would keep a physician from keeping the pregnant person alive and treating cases of ectopic pregnancies, miscarriages, cancer, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, etc.
* The indirect loss of human life in the effort to save another human life is tragic, but is not morally the same as electively, directly ending a human life.

Finally, the issue that this bill will result in the loss of bodily autonomy for women and pregnant people is perhaps the issue being discussed most vigorously. This is a serious issue. We are talking about weighing my right to bodily autonomy against the right to life of another living human. I will not pretend a conflict of rights does not exist in the situation of pregnancy.

* Whose right gets precedence in lawful protection and ability to be expressed?
* Does my right to refuse the use of my body to another human overpower the right of another human to *merely exist*?
* There are so many exceptional philosophers who have put forth a lot of time and effort to talk and write and debate about this specific conflict of human rights. Because it is a conflict. *They cannot both be absolute rights.*
* But to put it simply, the expression of some of my rights should end when using them would infringe upon another human’s most basic rights and would actively harm an innocent human.
	+ The limiting of my bodily autonomy in these types of circumstances already exists—laws against drunk driving, public indecent exposure, rape, assault and battery, robbery, fraud, etc. are there to protect humans from being harmed by other humans expressing absolute bodily autonomy.
* Refraining from expressing, in one single, very particular manner, for a very limited amount of time, my right to bodily autonomy, is the right thing to do when an innocent human life I brought into existence is at risk of being directly ended.

As a side note to the portion of the bill no one seems to have a problem with, I also support this bill’s creation of a bipartisan, joint legislative committee on adoption promotion and support. This is one small step we all can take to ensure all humans, born and preborn, have a better chance to pursue life, liberty, and happiness without directly harming or ending the life of other humans in the process.

This bill is not really about women’s rights or reproductive rights. This bill is about *human* rights.

This bill is basically saying human rights (and protections of those rights) should begin when we can easily see obvious signs of human life.

* We know human life begins before we can see obvious signs of it.
* We’ve known since 1990 that embryonic cardiac activity is detectable around 3 weeks post-fertilization (3)
* We know by 3 weeks post-fertilization, the neural tube, the first concrete brain structure, is also present (4)
* We have technology which allows us to detect obvious signs of human life as early as 6 weeks gestational age (approximately 4 weeks post-fertilization) but also as late as 8 weeks (or about 6 weeks post-fertilization).

Yesterday was the anniversary of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed into existence in Paris on December 10th, 1948. The Preamble of the Declaration--the very first sentance--states, “Whereas recognition of the *inherent dignity* and of the *equal* and *inalienable* rights of *all members of the human family* is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world…” and it goes on to lay out what those freedoms are, some of which, as stated in Article 3, include life, liberty, and security of person. (5)

This bill would be a huge step forward in securing the rights of the youngest and most vulnerable humans in Ohio—humans who cannot yet advocate for themselves, give consent, be guilty of any crime, or intentionally harm another human. These are humans who need to be granted the protection to merely exist.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Chairman, Members.

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