

Lauren Blauvelt-Copelin
Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 27
House Civil Justice Committee

Chairman Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present opponent testimony on Senate Bill 27.

No matter our skin color, where we live or where we're from, when it comes to our health, we all want to get accessible care that keeps us safe. But, Ohio Republican politicians have focused continuously on stripping Ohioans of the right to make health care decisions, this time in the middle of a devastating pandemic. Right now, while Ohioans are battling the impact that COVID-19 has had on their families' health, their jobs, schools, and the state economy, it is all the more critical that people have the ability to make safe and informed choices about their reproductive futures. Access to reproductive health screenings, contraception, and abortion is always essential, and even more so in times of uncertainty like those we are facing today. This pandemic has highlighted what we already knew -- we all benefit when we all have access to affordable health care. Ohioans deserve legislators who make communities safe, not actively create laws to put their lives in danger.

In addition to all of that Senate Bill 27 creates significant logistical hurdles for clinics. And, by doing so, Senate Bill 27 will make access to abortion more difficult for patients who are trying to access needed health care— which is precisely the goal of this Bill. Furthermore, Senate Bill 27 forces a burial ritual on the patient, which is totally unrelated to patients' wants or needs, is stigmatizing, and creates a barrier of access for people who need to have an abortion. Like all restrictions that have come before it, this barrier disproportionately affects Black people, people of color, people with low income, and people who live in rural areas.

This bill is not only unnecessary but is intended to decrease access to abortion care with the ultimate goal of eliminating all access to abortion in the state. There are already laws in place in Ohio that require safe medical tissue disposal and Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio and Planned Parenthood Southwest Ohio Region follows them. Health centers work with patients on a case-by-case basis to answer any questions they may have about embryonic or fetal tissue disposal. This Bill, however, would force all patients seeking a surgical abortion to choose how their tissue will be disposed of by either burial or cremation before they are allowed to have an abortion. And, it would force Planned Parenthood health centers to coordinate unnecessary, expensive, and purposefully burdensome logistics of arranging for cremation and burial--a process that is not required for other medical tissue.

This bill is intended to make it more difficult to provide abortion services to the patient of this state and it is possible that abortion providers will not be able to comply with the provisions that require clinics to rely on and contract with those who provide cremation and burial services in the state. This would have a devastating impact on abortion care in Ohio.

Our legislators are elected to protect Ohioans. They have used their position, power, and time to create havoc on our communities. These legislators could be expanding our access to health care. They could be addressing the maternal death rate—which Ohio has one of the highest rates in the country and a rate that disproportionately affects Black people, by addressing racism in health care, and social determinants of health.

For example, these legislators could be acting on HB60, which exempts infant and toddler diapers from sales tax. They could be acting on HB 611, which allows Medicaid reimbursement for doula care. Or HB 554, which allows pregnant minors to make their own health care decisions. There are endless areas where these legislators could be working to make Ohioans and our communities safe. They are choosing not to. They are choosing to endanger us by further blocking access to abortion for patients who already have too many barriers to care.

We are yet again reaching a peak in this pandemic, a peak that is directly tied to the inaction of these same Republican legislators working to take away health care access. Instead of working toward action around saving lives and relieving the economic burden weighing on all Ohioans, these Republican legislators are focusing on Bills that once again attack our already struggling communities. We have come to expect this nasty behavior from them, so much so that it doesn't make headlines or seem abnormal to many.

This legislation has nothing to do with protecting patients or improving health care in Ohio. They are part of an effort from anti-abortion politicians whose sole intention is to single out abortion providers and ultimately block all access to safe, legal abortion in Ohio.

Senate Bill 27 is detrimental to a patient seeking care, and the newly added amendment would make its impact even worse. This amendment would prevent those who have been the victims of rape or incest from seeking access to abortion services at public hospitals. Further, it stigmatizes doctors that provide abortion care. With this addition, if passed, public hospitals are prohibited from offering abortion services even in extreme circumstances, and are banned from employing a doctor who performs abortions. As you all already know, and as is common practice, some of Planned Parenthood doctors split their time between health care centers and public hospitals. You already know this because attacking doctors yet again is the point of this amendment.

This amendment would be an overreach by the legislature, attempting to restrict not simply how physicians provide care, but where and to what patients. By preventing public hospitals from employing certain physicians, the state inserts itself directly into hospital employment decisions, even though the legislature does not involve itself in these decisions in any other area of medical care. Indeed, this amendment would be sanctioning employment discrimination against abortion providers. This is a practice other states have worked to end by prohibiting retaliatory discipline and firing of health care professionals based on their providing abortion services.

Another goal of this Bill is to further stigmatize people who make the personal decision to have an abortion. This Bill seriously threatens the patient's privacy and confidentiality. Paperwork that is typically required for burial and cremation may also be required for some or all patients. Since such documents can be made public, a patient who has decided to have an abortion could have their private medical information exposed.

This legislation is about politics and not about health care. It will not result in healthier communities but instead continue to stigmatize Ohioans who should have the right to make their own personal decisions about their health and family. The goal, like all other restrictions before it, is to limit our rights to the point of extinction.

If this Bill is enacted it could impose an astronomical cost to Planned Parenthood's health centers, and the proposed amendment would prohibit doctors from working in public hospitals, which could force them to stop providing care in clinics. Together, and on their own, each of these outcomes could force clinics to close. These closures would have a devastating impact on the families and communities they serve. If history has taught us one thing, it is that eliminating safe, legal abortion does not stop abortions from happening. Patients will either self-administer abortions or be forced to travel to other states for needed health care. These are patients who

are already struggling with costs before the pandemic. These are patients who have taken the brunt of this pandemic because they largely represent the sectors that have been hit and needed support for children at home.

Instead of making Ohioans' lives better, Republican legislators are doing what they have always done—attacking health care access while continuing to scapegoat patients that need health care. It is for these reasons and many more I encourage you to vote No on SB 27.

Thank you for your time.