

Testimony of Chrisse France, Executive Director, Preterm

Ohio House Civil Justice Committee

December 3, 2020

Once again, the Ohio legislature is attempting to pass Senate Bill 27, a bill whose sole goal is to significantly limit access to safe, legal abortion care and will undermine the choices of women and pregnant people by requiring medically unnecessary burial or cremation of fetal tissue following an abortion. Today, I write, again, in respectful opposition to this bill.

Every day, Preterm's patients come in needing compassionate, empathetic, safe abortion, and sexual healthcare. When a woman or pregnant person decides to have an abortion, it is a deeply personal decision, often requiring unknowable thought and reflection. This bill ensures that women and pregnant people are not able to make the best decisions for them when it comes to their personal healthcare and instead creates additional, unnecessary cost barriers to push abortion care out of reach.

When a person comes in to receive abortion care, Preterm is there for them. Not just to make sure they are receiving the safest, most affordable medical care that we can provide, but emotional support when they ask for it. Patients at Preterm who would like guidance on burial or cremation are supported by trained advocates who understand fetal development, burial, cremation, and what patients should expect throughout the process. We work hand-in-hand with each of our patients to ensure they understand their full scope of options and that the option they choose meets their emotional and spiritual needs.

Abortion providers like Preterm already handle embryonic and fetal tissue in accordance with state law to ensure that it is safe and appropriately handled. Just as there are laws that regulate medical tissue for other healthcare providers, there are already reasonable regulations for abortion providers and we work in strict accordance with them.

Ohio's politicians want to force a woman who has had an abortion or a miscarriage to have to consider burial services, and in some cases, get a death certificate for fetal tissue—it's inappropriate and cruel. Rather than focusing on much-needed policy to make Ohio a safe place for people to have the families they desire, including passing bills that protect people and their families from a deadly pandemic and ensure their economic security, there is focus on unnecessary mandates that do not improve access to healthcare.

As experts in providing care for women and pregnant Ohioans, we at Preterm know that SB 27 will harm women and families in Ohio. It will not result in fewer people needing abortion care, nor will it result in fewer unplanned pregnancies or more support for families which Ohioans desperately need. SB 27 does not serve any public health benefit, and, because of the way it would be enforced, would instead lead directly to the closure of abortion clinics. The requirements of this bill would impose steep financial burdens on women and pregnant people in Ohio and on nonprofit clinics like Preterm, who already provide significant financial assistance to our patients.

It is not anyone's place to judge or decide for anyone what they would or should do, whether or not they should have an abortion, how they should grieve or not, or what is the appropriate way to feel. There is no right or wrong way to feel about abortion, and we stand with our patients in recognizing that their reproductive decisions and the emotions they feel around them are nuanced, complex, and unique.

Soon, you will get to vote on SB 27. Your vote will decide whether the women and people who use our services every day can come to closure in the way that feels right for them with the guidance of medical professionals and staff, under the adherence of already strict guidelines or whether the state of Ohio will force a woman or person who has had an abortion to have to consider and decide upon burial or cremation services without regard for her religious or faith practices, family situation, support system, or personal circumstances.

The state of Ohio is not a faith advisor, nor a doctor, and they should leave these deeply personal decisions to the people they affect and to the professionals guiding their care.

Sincerely yours,

Chrisse France

Executive Director