

John B. Casterline  
Interested Party Testimony  
Senate Bill 23  
Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman and Ranking Member Antonio and Members of the Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee.

My name is John Casterline, and I am testifying today on SB 23 as a citizen of Ohio. I am an academic/researcher specializing in demography and public health. I earned my MA and PhD from the University of Michigan. I am currently Lazarus Professor in Population Studies at The Ohio State University, and I serve as President of the Population Association of America, the leading organization for researchers in demography.

Scientists have conducted extensive research on the question: what are the consequences of unintended births?<sup>1</sup> At issue are consequences for children, for families, and for communities. In this testimony, I will share with you the main conclusions from this research, namely:

1. Children who were unintended births rate poorly on health indicators and other aspects of child development.
2. The siblings of unintended births also suffer negative consequences.
3. The parents of unintended births show worse emotional well-being, and their relationships are more likely to break up.

Researchers classify a pregnancy as “unintended” if a woman says that she did not want to have a child at the time she became pregnant. Overall, about one-third of births in the United States result from an unintended pregnancy. Women who seek induced abortions are women with an unintended pregnancy; if they do not obtain the abortion, then an unintended birth will occur.

First, the disadvantage of the child. Children born from an unintended pregnancy are disadvantaged in many respects. The mother receives less prenatal care, and the babies are more likely to be low birthweight. These children are less likely to be breastfed. Later, these children are in worse health<sup>2</sup>, and they show slower socio-emotional development<sup>3</sup>. Even in young adulthood, these children have achieved less in school and show more symptoms of depression<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> These findings come from a large body of research summarized in Gipson, J. D., Koenig, M. A., & Hindin, M. J. (2008). The effects of unintended pregnancy on infant, child, and parental health: a review of the literature. *Studies in Family Planning*, 39(1), 18-38.

<sup>2</sup> Crissey, S. R. (2005). Effect of pregnancy intention on child well-being and development: Combining retrospective reports of attitude and contraceptive use. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 24(6), 593-615.

<sup>3</sup> Saleem, H. T., & Surkan, P. J. (2014). Parental pregnancy wantedness and child social-emotional development. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 18(4), 930-938.

<sup>4</sup> Su, J. H. (2017). Unintended Birth and Children’s Long-term Mental Health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 58(3), 357-370.

The negative effects ripple through the family: research shows that the older siblings of an unintended birth receive less family support and resources<sup>5</sup>.

I should add that the main reason women give for seeking an abortion is their concern that they will be unable to provide the care and resources to the child and its siblings that they would like. Empirical research shows this reason is valid.

Finally, the effects on parents. Research shows that unintended births are detrimental for the mental health of both mothers and fathers (especially mothers)<sup>6</sup>. Considering this, it is not surprising that having an unintended birth increases the chances that a relationship will break up<sup>7</sup>.

This is my concise summary of a large body of empirical evidence. Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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<sup>5</sup> As measured by the HOME score, a validated scale used to assess conditions in the home that contribute to child development, for example age-appropriate learning materials and parental interaction styles. Barber, J. S., & East, P. L. (2011). Children's experiences after the unintended birth of a sibling. *Demography*, *48*(1), 101-125.

<sup>6</sup> Su, J. H. (2012). Pregnancy intentions and parents' psychological well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *74*(5), 1182-1196.

<sup>7</sup> Guzzo, K. B., & Hayford, S. R. (2012). Unintended fertility and the stability of coresidential relationships. *Social Science Research*, *41*(5), 1138-1151. Maddow-Zimet, I., Lindberg, L., Kost, K., & Lincoln, A. (2016). Are pregnancy intentions associated with transitions into and out of marriage?. *Perspectives on sexual and reproductive health*, *48*(1), 35-43.