Chelsey Judge

This bill is of course really a continuation of a decades old debate about a very personal moral dilemma- abortion. Some view it as a reprehensible act to commit, some view it as a necessary medical procedure, and others view it as essential to make men and women equal. As both a product of a Catholic upbringing and a PhD-trained scientist with a vast love for life and humanity, I understand all these viewpoints.

In about second grade, as a student of a Catholic elementary school, I recall being assigned to write an essay on why abortion was wrong. This assignment was not intended to be a critical think piece to understand abortion. There was only one side to this argument- and it was that abortion was wrong. Under no circumstances was it ok. Looking back now, it seems odd that a school wouldn’t encourage free thought or critical thinking but asked me to write in a narrow fashion based on how they told me to think. But, it was a Catholic school, and the stance of the Catholic church is that abortion is wrong. Of course, it seemed wrong- it is taking away the potential of life. But as an adult who is lived a little, I realize that life is messy and filled with gray areas. As a scientist, I realize that we need to challenge our viewpoints to better understand them and see if they are upheld by objectivity.

As a scientist myself, I realize that data and evidence-based practices show that many women don’t even realize they are pregnant at about 6 weeks, when a heartbeat is detected. Reading through the available medical and public health literature, I realize that the most effective means to reduce abortion is to empower women economically, to improve comprehensive sexual education, and to make contraception readily available and affordable. If we want to get serious about making abortion so unappealing to women with healthy pregnancies, we need to make our society equal between men and women. We need to enforce laws that protect women from wrongful termination when they become pregnant, enforce protection for women from companies may not hire them because they may become pregnant, require paid maternity and paternity leave, and make sure childcare is affordable.

While it is absolutely a constitutional right for people to believe whatever religion they choose, it is not constitutional for any part of the US government- whether that be at the local, federal or state level- to impose a particular religious or moral belief upon an entire constituency. That seems to be what is occurring here with SB23. I have listened to testimony of medical professionals and concerned citizens cite evidence-based conclusions, data, objective perspectives and sound logical rationale why this bill is obstructive to women’s rights, personal freedom and in conflict with science and medicine. That’s how I know that this bill is not objectively-driven, it doesn’t address any of those issues, but instead is motivated by strong religious and moral beliefs that want to be imposed on others who do not share those beliefs. That is wrong.

Personally, I would never want to have an abortion, and I am so grateful to have never been in a position where I had to consider abortion. That’s an extremely difficult and heavy decision to make. And while I think that I would not choose an abortion- I don’t actually know. Actually, abortion isn’t something that any little girl dreams about getting one day. But life complicates those dreams. What if the I learned the pregnancy would create risk for my own health- what if there was a chance I wouldn’t make it? What if I learned there later, after the heartbeat, that there was significant risk for the fetus? What if the child had a serious medical condition, in which there was no cure or ready treatment? What if my husband thinks that abortion is the best outcome for me and the fetus? What if I didn’t have access to appropriate healthcare to even discover any of these potential risks, let alone afford care for the child? What if I feared giving my newborn up to the state- knowing the tragic fate that meets many children of state care? I am very pro-life, I care about the implications of all of these questions.

I stand before you today as a person of firm principles and deep beliefs, including very held strong beliefs about how to lead a good life. However, I realize that many people do not share these with me. I don’t judge others for having different views from me, and I certainly don’t try to impose them on others. I implore you not impose your views on the women of Ohio with SB23. Reducing abortion, viewing it as a medical necessity and requirement for equality between men and women are not mutually exclusive. In fact, I think all these varying viewpoints can find common ground. I think that because I share all these viewpoints. I implore you to stop with this bill, SB23, and instead work to find balance- to reduce abortion and empower BOTH men and women in Ohio to sustain America as a world leader in prosperity, personal freedom and social justice.