**Opponent Testimony**

Topic: SB 23 (6-Week Abortion Ban)

Senate Health, Human Services & Medicaid Committee

Hearing Date: March 6, 2019

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**Chairman Burke and Ranking Member Antonio,**

Last week, many of us heard testimony opposing SB 23 and I am here today to oppose it as well.

We heard how a 6-week ban, a deadline before many women even know they are pregnant, will not stop abortions. It will simply send us back to dark days of the 1960’s. Rich women will travel to other states, and middle class and poor women will seek out health-threatening and illegal back ally clinics or fumble with dangerous self-induced abortions.

I admit that I am old enough to remember the 1960’s and what happened to some of my teenage friends faced with unwanted pregnancy. I remember --which is why I will do what I can to prevent us going backward to the horror filled days of coat hangers in the basement. Abortion should be a safe procedure, with the decision made by a woman in consultation with her family and doctor, and at times, her spiritual guide.

We also heard last week that SB 23 is an economic issue. Setting up an abortion ban that deeply threatens the economic wellbeing and stability of poorer women and their families, will only serve to increase the growing wealth gap between rich and poor in our nation.

I believe that, at a foundational level, most of us would like to see a world where abortions are very, very rare. Safe but rare. And we’ve heard from different medical professionals that the most effective way to reduce abortions is to stop unwanted pregnancies.

And if our goal is to stop unwanted pregnancies, we already know a number of effective and efficient policy means to do that – we can offer comprehensive sex education, make contraceptives widely and cheaply available; guarantee equal pay, paid family leave, quality affordable health care, child care, and a living minimum wage. We can make sure that we no longer turn a blind eye to rape, incest and the trafficking of girls and young women.

These things we can do – if we have the will and if we really want to end unwanted pregnancies.

But abortion is not just a question of policy and health care and economics. It is a question of religious world views and values. I fear that some of us might want to guarantee that our particular religious worldview should dominate reproductive decisions in our country, regardless of the diversity of religious traditions we see in our pluralistic society. I fear that we trying to take lessons from those strife torn countries where religious authorities freely impose their version of judgmental religious law on everyone.

I want to ask us to remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 7: 1-2 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. **2**For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Today, women in Ohio are facing a policy that attacks our fundamental right to make decisions about our own bodies and our own futures, free from the fear of punishment, shame and stigma. In SB 23, we are moving further and further away from the religious values that recognize women’s worth and dignity and closer and closer to merciless subjugation and judgement.

The 2nd chapter of the Epistle of James tells us “no mercy will be shown those who are without mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Christian and other religious teachings demand that we love our neighbors and treat them with the same consideration and mercy we would treat ourselves. It does not sanction subjugating a neighbor’s rights in order to promote one’s own economic or political or even religious agenda. Matthew 7:12: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

This abortion ban is out of touch with [majority support](http://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/public-opinion-on-abortion/) in our country for reproductive rights, as seen in a 2018 Pew Foundation study. And this ban is even out of touch with most practicing people of faith, as seen in an extensive Public Religion Research Institute study just last year. This study found that the [majority of religious people](https://www.prri.org/research/abortion-reproductive-health-midterms-trump-kavanaugh/) across America’s Christian denominations support the legal right to choose abortion -- even if they personally would not choose abortion for themselves.

The attack on women’s rights contradict what our faith traditions teach us about compassion, love, and fairness that is due to all people. Policies that shame, punish, stigmatize and deny women’s basic rights as human beings take us all backward, putting our social and spiritual wellbeing at risk. While we may believe that ultimate salvation comes from divine grace, we also have a responsibility to live today, here and now, according to the values of our faith and strive for human laws that bring us closer to our values and Beloved Community. SB 23 moves us in the opposite direction. Please vote against this bill.

I would be happy to answer any questions the committee members may have.