**Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee**

**Wednesday, March 6, 2019**

**SB 23 Prohibit Abortion-Detectable Heartbeat**

**Opponent Testimony**

My name is Phyllis Carlson-Riehm and I am presenting opponent testimony on behalf of ACTION OHIO Coalition For Battered Women, a statewide domestic violence coalition. This testimony is presented in opposition to SB 23 based on the potential adverse impact of this bill’s enactment on female victims of sexual violence first and foremost, but also on the basis of adversities for their families involved and their communities.

SB 23:

* Prohibits a person from knowingly and purposefully performing or inducing an abortion with the specific intent of causing or abetting the termination of a fetus (“the life of an unborn human individual”) whose fetal heartbeat has been detected.
* Provides that a person who violates the above prohibition is guilty of performing or inducing an abortion after the detection of a fetal heartbeat, a felony of the fifth degree.

Our nation was founded by people fleeing from persecution for their religious beliefs and practices. As a result, our Constitution and Bill of Rights establishes many forms of personal freedoms and values ensuring respect for different religious teachings and beliefs that guide citizens in their daily lives and behavior. The enactment of this bill would deny a large portion of the population the ability to make their reproductive choices in accordance with their best mental and physical health outcomes, in consultation with their medical professionals, and in consideration of their religious beliefs and with support from their spiritual advisers.

Pregnancy begins without immediate verification. Conception, the development of an embryo and then a fetus are not instantaneous. And each woman’s body as well as each pregnancy is unique, with different symptoms or no symptoms. A woman may suspect that she is pregnant, when in fact she is not. And she may not be aware when she does become pregnant. Consequently, prohibiting abortion at 6 weeks means that a woman is denied her choice before pregnancy may be suspected and could be confirmed – especially in view of other delays required by previous laws (related to access to abortion in Ohio) are taken into consideration.

For women who are victims of sexual violence, there are many complicating factors. Reports of incidents of incest, rape, and sexual violence within a domestic violence relationship may or may not be made to authorities or within the framework of seeking medical treatment. Reactions to such sexual trauma include confusion, denial, fear, and emotional paralysis. With the passage of SB 23, delays will serve as a roadblock to the option of ending an unwanted pregnancy that was never planned and hoped for. Pregnancy as the result of a crime can be a life sentence for the girl, teen or adult woman. If she is able to make the decision to continue or discontinue the pregnancy (either way), it can be a different story.

Victims of incest, rape and sexual violence within a domestic violence relationship may survive the physical trauma, but they are left with physical and emotional scars that can last a lifetime. The adversities do not end with the live birth or termination of the fetus, but endure for years to come as victims continue to struggle with what happened to them. The recent #Me Too Movement and the victims of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, who have been coming forward, have increased awareness of the long-term effects of sexual abuse and the pain it has caused in people’s lives. Being forced to carry a pregnancy to term and then parenting that child or giving it up for adoption extend the tragedy and problematic life circumstances.

I urge committee members to think long and hard about the potential impact of SB 23. Passage of this bill could be devastating in the lives of many Ohioans, who are depending on all of you to consider their lives and well being as well as their diverse beliefs and values. Legislators are elected to represent their constituents – all of their constituents, even the ones who do not agree with them.

Thank you for your consideration of our viewpoint.

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