

## Testimony in Opposition to SR 41

**Submitted to: Ohio State Senate  
Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee**

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Opponent**

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Chairman Burke and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Resolution 41. If my testimony seems incomplete or rushed, it's because I deleted everything I wrote on Monday morning and started over. I'd like to explain why I felt the need to do that.

Around 8am on Monday, after I kissed my son goodbye and started to get settled into my workday, I got a flurry of messages from friends warning me that a notoriously violent and radical anti-abortion organization, Created Equal, was plastering photos of my pregnant body on their public social media accounts, telling their followers that I was a "murderer" and had plans to "rip the limbs off" my baby if he was born with any physical imperfections.

Radical anti-abortion extremists have done this before. They called Dr. George Tiller "Tiller Tiller Baby Killer" before they murdered him in his church. Dr. David Gunn was murdered on March 10, 1993 by a radicalized anti-abortion activist who hid in a bush near Gunn's clinic entrance and yelled "Don't kill any more babies" before shooting the physician and father three times in the back. After these murders and more, a group of 30 anti-abortion protesters signed a statement that included this sentence:

*"We assert that if Michael Griffin did in fact kill David Gunn, his use of lethal force was justifiable provided it was carried out for the purpose of defending the lives of unborn children."*

Groups like Operation Rescue, Created Equal, and Ohio Right to Life are branches of this ideology. While they now stop short of publicly calling for the murder of people who support abortion access, their dog whistles couldn't be clearer. And with the passage of SR 41, the State of Ohio will become complicit in their calls for violence.

My mother asked me not to do this today. She's worried for my safety.

I'm getting to that age where you begin to realize your mom wasn't totally wrong about everything. In fact, she's exactly right about the risks associated with my decision to speak out today. I'm worried for my safety, too. I have a family to protect now, including my 18-month-old son. Are any of Created Equal's followers angry enough to try to kill me after hearing Ohio State Senators accuse me of murdering "unborn children" or committing "infanticide?" After hearing President Trump call abortion "execution" and listening to Scott Walker compare abortion to murdering an infant? To be honest, I don't know.

Robert Dear was angry enough to murder people. The violent rhetoric and inflammatory misinformation swirling around this issue since that horrible November day have only increased. And it scares me. Senator Burke and members of this committee, I am begging you to put a stop to this dangerous escalation of anti-abortion anger and violence before someone else is killed. It could be me next. It could be my son. It could be my husband, or one of my friends. Whoever it is, as willing messengers of this call to arms – as a body that has been willingly manipulated and used as a mouthpiece by callous, violent extremists – their

blood will be on your hands.

As I've said before this body in the past, the reasons people decide to have abortions – at any point in pregnancy – are personal. We're all the experts in our own lives and there's no way any of us can know what another person is feeling or thinking. We must simply trust and love one another. For many, the ability to have an abortion and end a pregnancy is freedom. A lifeline. It was for me.

I usually try to spare you all from the gory details of the domestic violence and abuse I endured during my first marriage, but faced with the lies perpetuated by SR 41, I feel the need to set the record straight about the realities of abortion. I'm going to talk about it today, and you're going to listen to the truth.

It started with a slap here and there, and escalated quickly: hard, strong punches on my shoulder blades, kidneys, and ribs where people wouldn't see the bruises, concussions when my head was shoved into doorframes, bruises on my hands from fighting back when I was being strangled, and a broken nose that still makes it hard for me to breathe at night.

I couldn't afford to leave that marriage, and the stigma and shame around being a victim of violence made me believe it was all my fault. I was too embarrassed to ask for help, and the emotional abuse I lived through made me feel like I wasn't worth it anyway. I felt like I had no way out, so I tried to pretend everything was fine and I just focused on surviving.

And then I was pregnant. It wasn't just about me anymore. If I couldn't even protect myself from physical harm when my spouse was angry, how in the world was I going to protect a screaming newborn in the middle of the night? If I couldn't get him to stop punching me when I was fit and strong and fast, how vulnerable would my body be at 9 months pregnant?

All of this flashed before my eyes in the span of about a minute after I saw the positive pregnancy test. I was surer in that moment than I had ever been about anything in my life that I needed to have an abortion. I had that abortion, without question, hesitation, regret, or fear, and it continues to be the best decision I've made in my life. Becoming a mother and experiencing the struggle that comes along with having a baby and raising a child has only made my gratitude for that abortion grow stronger.

I am appalled that this Committee, this Senate, and this General Assembly continue to wage war on abortion access by spreading lies, misinformation, and hate about people like me and the physicians who make abortion possible for people who need it. Issues like SR 41 are practically pointless, but the violence, stigma, and fear they stoke in our society are fueling an unchecked, dangerous fire that will undoubtedly lead to more harm.

I will not let you intimidate me, I will not let you silence me, I will not let you scare me. I'm standing in front of you today, Chairman Burke and the rest of this Committee, to beg you to protect women and families like mine. Please abandon this resolution and refuse to let your platform be used to spread vile, toxic lies and hate speech. Ohio deserves better than this. We deserve access to abortion care when we need it, without interference from politicians or extremists who try to turn our bodies into political pawns.