

Good Morning, Chairman Burke and Ranking Member Antonio.

I am Rabbi Jessica Shimberg. I serve as the spiritual leader of The Little Minyan Kehilah in Columbus, Ohio, and work extensively in interfaith spaces and conversations designed to strengthen the fabric of our communities.

A central Ohio resident for nearly all my life, I come before you today as an engaged citizen and faith leader to implore that you consider the ways in which a number of you are using your sense of Christian values to violate the religious liberties of all Ohioans.

As a rabbi and pastoral counselor, a former attorney, mediator and facilitator of conflict resolution, and a mother of two college-age sons, I beseech you to oppose S.B. 27, which violates Jewish values and ethics. Also, this bill is clearly designed to limit access to safe, legal abortion care in Ohio and, on its face, to further traumatize women who have made a difficult, personal choice to treat the fetal tissue as a dead person.

In the Torah, the chief biblical source referring to abortion is Exodus 21:22–25, concerning the man who inadvertently strikes a pregnant woman, causing her to lose the pregnancy. The attacker is not liable for homicide for the death of the fetus. However, if the woman dies, the man is liable for her homicide.

In translating the Hebrew text into Greek, the Septuagint ascribed a word referencing the mother as referring to the fetus and its stage of development. (That is, if the fetus had reached a certain stage of development of identifiable human formation, the attacker was liable for its death.) The Septuagint translation was the beginning of the separate approaches on the topic of abortion within Judaism and Christianity (which later set quickening, i.e. fetal movement, as the criterion for sufficient formation and still later equated conception with formation).

However, in Judaism, full human status is still considered to manifest at birth. The Hellenistic position and that of the early church stand in opposition to the position which became normative Jewish law. Jewish values prioritize the life of a woman over that of an unborn fetus, and although we treat decisions about a fetus with great care and weight, the woman's health is paramount.

We have come a long way in how we treat women and girls in America. We must not return to policies that restrict our agency over our bodies and force us into situations that threaten our well-being — physically, psychologically, or spiritually. Decisions about women's health and well-being must remain with women.

It is dark and dangerous to substitute the moral posture of certain legislators (based solely on those lawmakers' religious beliefs vs. medical or public health concerns) for a woman's own judgment, spiritual and theological discernment, and deliberation about her own physical and mental health and how her reproductive choices impact her future.

Restricting a woman's choice does not save life; it endangers life. As a woman, I am deeply troubled by the impact S.B 27 would have on all women. As a rabbi, I am further concerned by the way that this proposed legislation violates Jewish values, law, and practices.

Thank you for your careful discernment and your attention to the bedrock religious liberties your proposed legislation threatens.