



HB 276

Opponent Testimony

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Dear Chairman LaRe, Vice-Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer opponent testimony for HB 276.

My name is Blyth Barnow, I am a minister and I serve as the Ohio Associate Director for Faith in Public Life. Faith in Public Life is a network of clergy who are united in the prophetic pursuit of the common good. It is in service to this mission that I ask you to oppose HB 276.

This legislation will not increase the safety of people engaged in sex work or human trafficking survivors. In fact it will criminalize nearly every aspect of their lives by making it a possible felony to pay their rent, pay for childcare, and meet their basic needs. People engaged in sex work use the money they have earned to pay for their living expenses. Are we really prepared to say that anyone who knows their line of work and then accepts anything of value from them is breaking the law? This legislation would have catastrophic unintended consequences and destroy both families and communities.

As a faith leader I know that shame and increased criminalization do nothing to make our communities safer. Instead it puts those most marginalized at higher risk by pushing them farther into isolation and fear. Faith leaders reject false moralism and demand meaningful action that would actually serve to protect children of God. Policies such as these are often cloaked in well meaning concern, which often simply amounts to a distorted version of Christian morality that costs women and workers their safety and their lives.

HB 276 may be rooted in good intentions but it does not reflect the on the ground reality of people engaging in sex work. The sacred lives of those engaged in sex work cannot be boiled down to oversimplified metaphors about supply and demand. The sex trade and the reasons people engage it are far more complicated than that.

If the true measure of success for proposals such as this is the increased safety and well being of people in the sex trade, then let the funds that would be used on this dangerous and ineffective policing effort instead be directed towards housing, childcare, living wages, and a stronger social safety net. We do not support people engaged in sex work by making their job more dangerous, we support them by increasing their access to safety, support, and choice.

The bottom line is that this legislation would endanger women and disproportionately impact vulnerable workers who are migrants, transgender, and/or people of color. If you care about violence against women, immigrant justice, workers rights, or economic sustainability then please oppose HB 276.

Thank you again for this opportunity to offer testimony against HB 276. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Blyth Barnow
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Faith In Public Life