

Testimony on HB 496

Representative Manchester, Vice Chair Representative Cutrona, Ranking Member Representative Denson and all the distinguished members of this Families, Aging and Human Services Committee, my name is Pamela Kolanz and I thank you for this opportunity to come before you. I am a traditional community midwife serving home birthing families, both Amish, Plain and Mainstream families, in NE Ohio for almost 30 years. As well, I am a midwife at the Middlefield Care Center, an exempt Amish birth center in Middlefield, Ohio. Professionally, I serve on the Board of Directors of the Community Midwives of Ohio and am a long-standing officer of the Ohio Midwives Alliance. I also remain a 30-year Chapter Leader of the International Cesarean Awareness Network of Greater Cleveland and am a co-author of the publication "*From Calling To Courtroom*". I affirm to you that my calling to midwifery, and the families I have the privilege of serving, is deeply rooted in my heart, along with the almost 4,000 babies my hands have welcomed.

I am in opposition of HB 496 and the proposed substitute bill as currently written. Quite simply, HB 496 and the proposed substitute bill decreases parental birth choices. It eliminates the valuable unlicensed midwife along with the freedoms both exercise to accomplish a safe and satisfying birth for both mother and baby.

A history lesson: Midwifery is as old as time. Women birthing in the safety and comfort of their own homes before WWII was quite common and, in fact both of my parents and parent-in-laws were born at home. Women at that time were attended at home by unlicensed midwives, as they are today. Shamefully, the work of midwives came under attack post WWII in our country as hospitals established themselves and marketed their care. To get the public to hospital birth, an active false campaign against midwives was successfully undertaken. The past misrepresentation of midwifery care was especially strong in southern states. Laws were passed that, on paper, made it seem as if midwives were given a continued path to practice midwifery. In reality, those laws restricted and eliminated important midwifery care which some states are still struggling to overcome today. The resurgence of home birth and unlicensed midwifery care occurred in the 1960's due to the dissatisfaction with maternal and infant care in hospitals. I stand before you to engage your help to NOT repeat the legislative sins of the past against midwives and childbearing families. If this bill is passed, I will become a criminal although I am not one now. It is estimated that over half of the approximate 100 unlicensed midwives currently practicing in Ohio will also enter criminal status along with me.

Earlier this week, each member of this committee received a sampling packet of over 200 letters from the Amish, Plain and Mainstream public. Due to the time and day of this hearing, it would be a huge travel and financial hardship for most working families to appear here today, especially on short notice. Families all over Ohio want you to fully understand the impact you will have in the private bedrooms of birthing women in our state. I implore you, if you haven't already, read those letters... hear their truth and further understand the bigger repercussions HB 496 and the substitute bill will have on their real families! It is a very different reality for them than it appears on the legislative paper of this bill.

Understand that families choose to home birth largely because they want to be outside a regulated system and make choices regarding their care that are best for them and not mandated by medicalized care. Direct-entry midwives holistic training is to oversee and support wellness in a pregnant woman. Assistance with birth and the postpartum period is unlike the medical model of Obstetrics, Nursing or

Nurse-Midwifery care. Regulating and licensing traditional community midwifery care under a medical board such as the Board of Nursing is risky to my profession and families we serve.

And we've been down this road before in the Ohio Legislature! Years ago, another bill sought to criminalize non-nurse midwives and the Direct-Entry Midwifery Study Council was created. It met for over a year to see what, if any, regulation was needed in the practices of unlicensed midwives. Each of you received a copy of that report via electronic transmission months ago and again this week. I hope you read it! So many hours, testimony and tax dollars were spent looking very closely at my profession. The Study Council's majority recommendations were to (1) legislatively decriminalize the unlicensed practice of midwifery (2) utilize a process of informed consent (3) register (not license) practicing direct-entry midwives and (4) advance public information regarding home birth and direct-entry midwives. Yet, here we are... years later with HB 496 and it's substitute bill ignoring those important recommendations! It would seem to me that your committee has a great opportunity here and now to do something very worthwhile by directing sponsoring legislators to come forth with a bill to reflect the recommendations of that Study Council rather than this elaborate government overstep, called HB 496 or it's substitute bill. Rep. Koehler testified that "there is no problem with midwifery in our state", yet this bill 's goal is to completely change what has been working well for so many decades. What's that saying... "if it ain't broken, don't try to fix it because you will surely break it".

You are asked to amend or reject this bill because it criminalizes the unlicensed midwife. Families in Ohio need their continued outstanding care and low maternal and infant mortality rates. Eliminating one kind of midwife to uphold another does not make sense, nor does it best serve safe childbearing for families.

You are asked to amend or reject this bill because it will regulate non-nurse midwives under the Board of Nursing. Non-nurse midwives can not effectively or fairly be regulated by a medical board which has historically been opposed to non-nurse midwives and has totally different training and philosophies regarding childbirth. The Ohio Department of Health has been working successfully with non-nurse midwives for many years and continues to be the best board to expand non-nurse midwifery care options in Ohio.

You are asked to amend or reject this bill with its discriminatory religious exemptions because it doesn't include a non-severability clause protecting those exemptions. ALL persons in Ohio should be able to avail themselves to non-nurse midwifery care regardless of whether they, or their chosen midwife, are considered "religious". Unlicensed midwives must legally be able to assist both religious and non-religious families alike.

And finally, you are asked to amend or reject this bill because it does not uphold the important recommendations of the Direct-Entry Midwifery Study Council of the Ohio Legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today... I am happy to answer questions you may have.

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