



**WOMEN HAVE OPTIONS OHIO (WHO/O)  
OPPONENT TESTIMONY ON HB 598  
HOUSE GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE  
MAY 26, 2022**

Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 598. My name is Jordyn Close, and I am Board Chair of Women Have Options Ohio—also called WHO/O—Ohio’s only statewide abortion fund. In addition to my work with WHO/O, I’m also the Executive Fellow at Ohio Women’s Alliance Action Fund. WHO/O and OWAAF believe that self-determination includes complete bodily autonomy, and abortion bans like this are a direct attack on our freedom. Even though you are trying to minimize our voice by limiting the testimony here today, the reality is that a majority of Ohioans support access to abortions, and it is your responsibility to fight for our right to bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom and justice.

Over the last three decades, WHO/O has provided financial and practical support to help Ohioans afford contraception, emergency contraception, and abortion services. We distribute funds to all of Ohio’s clinics & coordinate with patients to arrange transportation, lodging, childcare, and more so they can access the care they deserve.

As you know, HB 598 would effectively ban abortion in all cases, and the so-called ‘exceptions’ provided within the language appear only to be affirmative defenses, not true exceptions. Today, I am urging committee members to vote against HB 598, but more importantly, I am using this time to speak directly to the Ohioans at home who may need an abortion in the coming months.

## **EVERY ABORTION IS ESSENTIAL**

I have felt like I had to justify my abortion because of stigmatizing narratives by saying things like, “I wasn’t financially stable,” or that “I was too young.” What it ultimately comes down to is that I just didn’t want to be pregnant, and I didn’t want to be a parent. And that’s all the justification anyone needs.

The barriers I experienced in accessing my abortion were not moral or emotional—they were financial and logistical because of the policies and regulations in place in Ohio.

When abortion is pushed out of reach, people don’t stop trying to end unwanted pregnancies. Instead, some people go to extraordinary lengths and out of state to receive their care while Others are forced to continue unwanted pregnancies, stripping them of their autonomy.

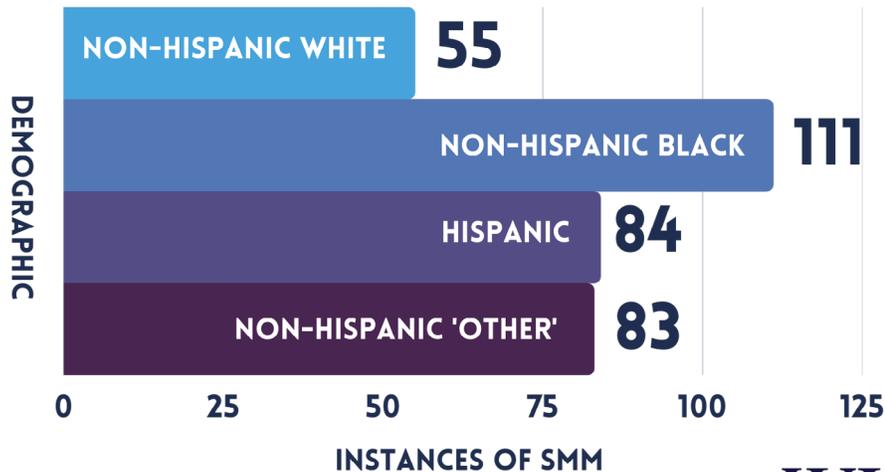
## **FORCED PREGNANCY RESULTS IN SEVERE MATERNAL MORBIDITY AND DEATH**

Abortion is as safe, normal, and ethical as any other medical procedure. In fact, in December 2021, [a Duke study](#) found that abortion bans could lead to a 21% increase in the number of pregnancy-related deaths with that number jumping to 33% among Black women. In Ohio already, a recent ODH report found that Black mothers die at a rate [over 250% higher](#) than their White counterparts. As the [Harvard School of Public Health concisely puts it](#), this is “simply because staying pregnant is more dangerous than having an abortion.”



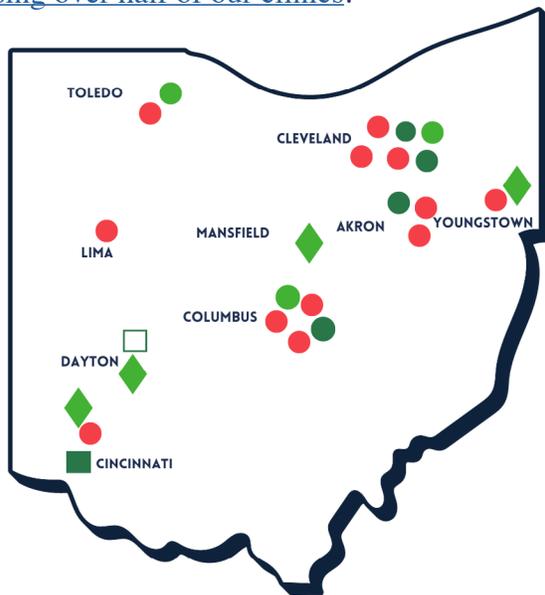
In 2021, the [Ohio Department of Health shared studies](#) that found Black and Asian mothers not only experienced higher maternal mortality but were also at twice the risk for Severe Maternal Morbidity (SMM). SMM is defined by “near miss” unplanned events that “could have resulted in death, but didn’t.” Reducing SMM is one of six top priorities for ODH’s State Health Improvement Plan.

## RATE OF SEVERE MATERNAL MORBIDITY (SMM) IN OHIO PER 10,000 BIRTHS:



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Even if these rates were not dire, ALL Barriers to abortion are racist, harmful, classist and a tool of white supremacy. Bans on abortion are just one of the coordinated attacks by extremist lawmakers to control and punish Black, Indigenous and other people of color, as well as queer, trans, and non-binary communities. These laws are designed to shame and stigmatize. The cruelty is not a byproduct—the cruelty is the point. Hundreds of medically unnecessary restrictions have been passed in the last 10 years. 30 bans have been passed in Ohio alone, [closing over half of our clinics](#).



### DATA FROM OHIO POLICY EVALUATION NETWORK (OPEN)'S RESOURCE TITLED, "ABORTION CLINICS IN OHIO SINCE 2010"

- PROCEDURAL SERVICES
- PROCEDURAL FACILITIES OPERATING UNDER A VARIANCE
- PROCEDURAL FACILITIES APPLYING FOR A VARIANCE
- MEDICATION-ONLY SERVICES
- ◆ TELEMEDICINE-ONLY SERVICES
- CLOSED

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We know that abortion bans have detrimental health consequences on both pregnant people and their families. Abortion as a medical procedure is no more traumatizing than a root canal. Instead, the constant harassment from our state's legislature ensures ALL reproductive healthcare, not just abortion, stigmatized. This bill & the legislators behind it send a clear, divisive message to Ohioans. In this state, our leaders would rather us die pregnant than live to receive the abortion care we want and need.

## **NEED AN ABORTION? WHO/O CAN HELP.**

Contrary to anti-abortion testimony, self-managed abortions and in-clinic abortions are incredibly safe. Mifepristone and Misoprostol—both of which are used for safe, effective medication abortion—are FDA approved and send fewer people to the ER than Tylenol or Viagra. Ohioans can go to [www.PlanCPills.com](http://www.PlanCPills.com) to learn more about accessing these pills by mail—whether or not they're currently pregnant. These pills are safe and effective for self-managing abortions, and you can utilize these for pregnancies up to 11 weeks.

In-clinic abortion access is also crucial to protect and expand as part of a comprehensive reproductive health landscape. If you are an Ohioan in need of financial or practical support accessing abortion—whether that's getting transportation to & from clinics or covering the cost of childcare, doula support, and more—you can contact WHO/O by email at [help@womenhaveoptions.org](mailto:help@womenhaveoptions.org), by phone at 614-300-781. You can also find more information about what our abortion fund can provide by going to our website—[www.womenhaveoptions.org/help](http://www.womenhaveoptions.org/help). WHO/O is not going anywhere.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Opponent Testimony on HB 598. I would be happy to answer any additional questions that you may have through the Chair at this time.

