



Promoting Reproductive Justice for All  
*Pro-Faith, Pro-Family, Pro-Choice*

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**Testimony to the Community and Family Advancement Committee  
of the Ohio House of Representatives  
Opposition - HB69  
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Thank you, Chairman Derickson, Vice Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Howse, and members of the Community and Family Advancement Committee, for hearing my testimony.

I ask you to reject House Bill 69 and all restrictions and bans that limit a woman's access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including access to services that allow a woman to terminate her pregnancy safely.

I am Rev. Laura Young, an ordained United Methodist Minister and the Executive Director of the Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. I am a Christian and a mother of two. Despite what many assume, not all religious people are against abortion. In fact, many of us now and in the past have worked to keep abortion safe and legal. We see it as a justice issue -- an issue of compassion, love, and care. I notice people's faces light up with agreement when they see my button or bumper sticker that says, "Pro-faith, pro-family, pro-choice." Members of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice include members of The United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), The Unitarian Universalist Association, Reform and Conservative Judaism, Catholics for Choice, and other independent religious organizations.

People of faith do not agree about when life begins or on the definition of a person. Not all people of faith would choose to terminate a pregnancy themselves but still want abortion to be safe, legal, and accessible. But at the foundation of most faith traditions is the love of God and neighbor. Banning abortions is not loving, it is oppressing.

When a woman cannot safely terminate an unwanted or problem pregnancy, she and her family may become desperate. Doctors' hands are tied and clergy are put in anguishing positions as they minister with families.

Clergy are called to be with people who are living in the margins. Before Roe, ministers and rabbis banded together in the late 1960s and formed "Clergy Counseling Service on Abortion." When they disbanded at the time Roe was decided, they had 2,000 clergy members in their ranks. Their purpose was to protect women in their churches who for whatever reason could not or would not continue their pregnancies. They referred women to places where they could safely, although illegally, terminate their pregnancy. Clergy didn't

want the daughters in their congregations having back alley abortions and few had access to Park Avenue surgeons who could handle an unwanted pregnancy for a family with means.

Consider that before Roe, hospitals had "septic abortion wards." We do not want to go back to that. We do not want women driving from Ohio to Texas to cross the border to buy drugs to end a pregnancy.

Please do not make women and families go back to the days when abortion was banned; do not make doctors and clergy deal with the crises this situation creates. A woman will terminate a problem pregnancy whether it is legal or not; history shows us that. To force a woman to have a child when she does not want to is a flagrant and cruel abuse of personal liberty. If a woman, her family, her doctor, and her clergy person have decided it is best to end a pregnancy, government must not interfere with that.

The Bible doesn't say anything about banning abortion. But the Bible says a lot about how we are to treat those who are poor and marginalized. Jesus did not call for bans on healthcare; he called for healing.

When I was a pastor in an inner-city church that ministered primarily with people in extreme poverty, one of our volunteers from a big, wealthy congregation came to me, broken-hearted. He and his wife had just learned that the grandchild they were so eagerly anticipating would not survive. Their daughter-in-law was pregnant with a much-wanted child. But the pregnancy wasn't viable and the daughter-in-law they and their son loved so much was at risk if they waited for the fetus to die inside her before they removed it. He wanted to know what the United Methodist position on abortion was. I read to him from our book of church law that we do believe it is necessary that it remain legal.

The relief this man felt was palpable. He needed to hear that terminating this pregnancy was a moral option. I copied the page from the book and he took it home to show his family. They felt freer to make the difficult decision that needed to be made.

The Bible is a liberation document. In it, a loving God breathes life into human beings and gifts them with the freedom to live that life. There are 2.6 million living, breathing children in Ohio. Nearly one-quarter (26.3%) of Ohio's children live at or below the federal poverty line; there are 617,004 poor children in Ohio (2014 Ohio's KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK, p. 20). Ending child poverty is an example of a perfect place to focus our resources and legislative efforts. When we don't care for the least among us, we allow their futures to be aborted.

I ask that you stop these bans -- that you reject House Bill 69 -- and focus on supporting Ohioans in every way you can -- on working toward a just society -- so we all may seek to live the lives with which God has entrusted us.

Thank you.