

October 21, 2015

Testimony in Opposition to SB 214, De-funding of Planned Parenthood Bill

Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

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Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

Thank you, Chairperson Coley, Ranking Minority Member Yuko, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee.

I am the Rev. Richard Burnett, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church on Capitol Square in Columbus, Ohio, and a member of the Social Justice and Public Policy Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio. Today, I speak to you in opposition to Senate Bill 214. I also want to say why I support continued funding for Planned Parenthood's medical care for women, teens, and men in the state of Ohio.

First, as a clergy leader for over 30 years – and for the past 18 years your friend and neighbor here on Capitol Square – I have seen Planned Parenthood offer expert clinical services and wise counsel to many women of varied ages (along with their partners) in times of profound crisis and deep need. Planned Parenthood, like no other women's health provider that I've witnessed in pastoral ministry, has meant the difference between a restored, positive future and a tragic one over-and-over again.

As each of us knows, life is a blessing, but a complex and uncertain one. The Episcopal Church understands this and has been mindful of the need to respect and affirm every woman's dignity as she makes decisions related to her body. Therefore, even before the Supreme Court decision protecting abortion rights in all states and earlier than the 1970s, many lay and clergy leaders in the Episcopal Church served on Planned Parenthood boards, supported the medical care of the organization generously, and held the work of reproductive justice in personal and corporate prayer. I stand in the line of several of these recent heroes – the Rev. Walter Taylor, a past rector of Trinity Church during the 1970s, served on Planned Parenthood of Central Ohio's board of directors along with other lay members of the parish. Mothers, fathers, and children saw their lives improved thanks to brave members serving the wider Columbus community by supporting Planned Parenthood.

Now, it is my turn to speak up for Planned Parenthood. As I see the divisions in our governmental assemblies I am saddened that a medical and social agent for human welfare is targeted in alarming ways. Ohio is a state devoted to human flourishing, human welfare. And we must never stumble toward reaction or division when it comes to protecting the health and dignity of women and children who rely on affordable health care and other services offered every day at the Planned Parenthood centers in our state.

On a close on a very personal note: my spouse of 27+ years is a nurse practitioner specializing in women's health, and for the past 30+ years she has worked for Planned Parenthood in six states (including Ohio). She is committed to women's health and reproductive justice, she is a devoted churchwoman and mother of three adults with their own children, and she is a woman of hope. Because of her hope and the delight she exhibits in serving the underserved thru Planned Parenthood centers, I

have grown in my commitment to respect the sacredness and the complexities of life. Surely we can recast this present budget decision toward a commitment for a stronger future for all women and families in Ohio

I urge you to vote against SB 214.