

## **Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice**

January 26, 2016

Testimony in Opposition to HB 294

Thank you Chairman Coley and Ranking Minority Member Yuko and Members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee.

I am Rev. John Wallace, an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church. I have been a pastor since 1980. I live in Columbus and serve a United Methodist Church in Westerville. I have served as a pastor since abortion has been legal. I have learned of the importance of this option, from pastors who faced the challenge of supporting women with unintended pregnancies to find safe options. As a pastor, I have sought to walk with people and support them as they apply their faith to their lives. I have not told them what decisions to make but trusted them to make decisions informed by their faith in the living God.

I ask you to reject House Bill 294 that would defund Planned Parenthood's critical health care services. The statement of my United Methodist denomination on abortion encourages efforts to reduce unintended pregnancies. This fits with the goal of reducing abortions, which is a goal for persons across the spectrum of Pro-Life and Pro-Choice on this issue and is indeed the purpose of Planned Parenthood. This goal of reducing abortions is threatened by Senate Bill 294. Most of the services of Planned Parenthood relate to preventing unintended pregnancies and the general health of women. 97% of the work of Planned Parenthood is not abortion but these many other issues related to women's health. To interfere with funding that is not for abortions only prevents basic health services for women in various places across Ohio. Services offered are birth control, cancer screenings, STI testing and treatment and well-woman exams. The other day I saw a photo online of a young woman holding a poster that said "Thanks to Planned Parenthood I've never needed an abortion."

Access to health care should not be denied as a form of political opposition to one aspect of the work of Planned Parenthood. More than 80,000 Ohioans are served by Planned Parenthood Clinics each year. More than half of their health centers are in rural or medically-underserved areas, meaning that without Planned Parenthood, other community providers may not be able to provide care to the additional patients who need access to health care services. This is why defunding is the wrong step to take.

My personal pastoral experience with Planned Parenthood was supporting a young woman associated with my congregation in Columbus. She had gotten pregnant through a sexual encounter with a person with whom she could not expect ongoing support. She was not pushed to make the decision for an abortion, but was given the opportunity to make her own decision. Along with her mother, I accompanied her to the clinic for the abortion. It was important for her to have that option because motherhood is too important a commitment for someone to be forced into. I have varied experience with this issue. I have baptized a still born early term fetus, because the parents were looking forward to the birth of a child. A niece had an unintended pregnancy and made the decision to go through the nine month process. She gave birth to a child whom she gave up for adoption. The key in this is that such decisions should not be made by outsiders, but women need to be able to make such important decisions for themselves.

There are strong ethical and theological reasons to oppose House Bill 294 and encourage you to consider those reasons and oppose this bill. Thank you.