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**Testimony to the Government Oversight and Reform Committee
of the Ohio Senate
Opposition – HB 294
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Thank you, Chairman Coley, Ranking Minority Member Yuko, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, for hearing my testimony.

I ask you to reject House Bill 294 that would defund Planned Parenthood's critical health care services, and I ask you to reject all restrictions and bans that limit a woman's access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including access to abortion by certified medical providers.

I am Rev. Laura Young, the Executive Director of the Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (Ohio RCRC). I am an ordained United Methodist minister and a mother of two. Through education, advocacy, and counseling, RCRC lifts up progressive religious voices for reproductive health, rights, and justice. A woman of means in this country will always have access to the care she needs, so we are particularly concerned with the struggles of women in poor and minority communities, who are greatly affected by government policies that restrict their health care access.

Members of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice include The United Methodist Church (UMC General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Women), 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.

You have heard me testify against your Planned Parenthood defunding bill before. I am frustrated. I feel that the cries of the majority are not being heard. The religious view of a minority of conservative Christians is being legislated, and most people don't even know it. They don't know it likely because they are busy trying to work and care for their families and feel confident that Roe v. Wade is the law of the land.

The Religious Right has hijacked this conversation; the resulting legislation is creating havoc for women in this great state who are burdened by restriction after restriction on their reproductive health care. This bill does more of that.

The religious right does not represent the majority of your constituents. Even if it did, we know that legislating minority religious views is not the role of our government.

Legislating specific religious views goes against the principle of religious freedom. And, ideally, religion or any system of belief, would inform a citizen's vote, but not be the basis of our laws; but religion -- one particular minority view -- is forming the basis of laws and policies related to abortion and birth control and other reproductive health matters in this country right now.

As I stated before, I am ordained in The United Methodist Church; it is the largest Mainline Christian church in this country. This denomination grew along with the growth of our country, from its earliest days. Our founder, John Wesley, was an Anglican priest in the Church of England, where the church ruled the state, and in the late 1700s, came to the United States to spread the movement of people who had become known as Methodists, because of their methodical religious ways. Methodists are represented in probably every cross-section of the Christian population in our society. Methodists are presidents and presidential candidates, shopkeepers and teachers, doctors and nurses, custodians and CEOs, and Ohio Senators and Representatives.

Our tradition uses what we call "the Wesleyan Quadrilateral" to think through our faith and articulate it. This way of looking at a substantial issue is useful in our discussion today.

The four parts of the quadrilateral are scripture -- the foundation -- and also tradition, reason, and experience. Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Methodists, for hundreds of years in this country and now beyond it, have studied and discussed and prayed over and written about every kind of Christian theology you can imagine. John Wesley himself used more than 1,000 resources in addition to the Bible, as he articulated and shared his understanding of Christianity, evangelizing all over this new land. Christian beliefs do not boil down to a few scripture references or interpretations. They encompass lifetimes of study of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This are complex matters that even people in the same denomination don't agree on.

Every four years, we United Methodists have a general conference where all the laws of our church are proposed and amended and voted on. Can you imagine the number of people it requires to get a law passed in a denomination with 12 1/2 million members, 5 1/2 million of whom are outside the U.S.?

Considering all that, and considering the fact that this bill hinges on the moral issue of abortion and how that relates to who gets what funding, let me share some additional religious viewpoints far different from the conservative Christian beliefs fueling the anti-abortion legislation in this state and country. I'm going read a few phrases on abortion and "responsible parenthood" (sounds kind of like "*planned* parenthood") from our United Methodist Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions. I've included a reference in my written testimony so you may look at it yourself online. (<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/what-is-the-united-methodist-position-on-abortion>)

"The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence. While individuals have always had some degree of control over when they would die, they now have the awesome power to determine when and even whether

new individuals will be born. Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child. We recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures by certified medical providers [emphasis added]."

"We call all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may cause them to consider abortion. We entrust God to provide guidance, wisdom, and discernment to those facing an unintended pregnancy."

"The Church shall offer ministries to reduce unintended pregnancies. We commit our Church to continue to provide nurturing ministries to those who terminate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy, and to those who give birth."

"We mourn and are committed to promoting the diminishment of high abortion rates. The Church shall encourage ministries to reduce unintended pregnancies such as comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education, advocacy in regard to contraception..." This is exactly what Planned Parenthood does. "[continuing]... and support of initiatives that enhance the quality of life for all women and girls around the globe."

"Young adult women disproportionately face situations in which they feel that they have no choice due to financial, educational, relational, or other circumstances beyond their control. The Church and its local congregations and campus ministries should be in the forefront of supporting existing ministries and developing new ministries that help such women in their communities."

And perhaps most relevant to the barrage of anti-choice legislation moving through this esteemed legislative body:

"Governmental laws and regulations do not provide all the guidance required by the informed Christian conscience. Therefore, a decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, family, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel."

Now, I'll read a few key statements from our section on "responsible parenthood." I won't read them all here, but I've included them all in my written testimony.

"To support the sacred dimensions of personhood, all possible efforts should be made by parents and the community to ensure that each child enters the world with a healthy body and is born into an environment conducive to the realization of his or her full potential."

When an unacceptable pregnancy occurs, we believe that a profound regard for unborn human life must be weighed alongside an equally profound regard for fully developed personhood, particularly when the physical, mental, and emotional health of the

pregnant woman and her family show reason to be seriously threatened by the new life just forming. We reject the simplistic answers to the problem of abortion that, on the one hand, regard all abortions as murders, or, on the other hand, regard abortions as medical procedures without moral significance.

When an unacceptable pregnancy occurs, a family-and most of all, the pregnant woman-is confronted with the need to make a difficult decision. When a pregnancy occurs that appears to cause the parent or parents hardship, we in the church should bring all our resources of compassion and support to their aid, including prayer and encouragement. We believe that continuance of a pregnancy that endangers the life or health of the mother, or poses other serious problems concerning the life, health, or mental capability of the child to be, is not a moral necessity. In such cases, we believe the path of mature Christian judgment may indicate the advisability of abortion. We support the legal right to abortion as established by the 1973 Supreme Court decision. We encourage women in counsel with husbands, doctors, and pastors to make their own responsible decisions concerning the personal and moral questions surrounding the issue of abortion [emphasis added].

We therefore encourage our churches and common society to:

-- provide to all education on human sexuality and family life in its varying forms, including means of marriage enrichment, rights of children, responsible and joyful expression of sexuality, and changing attitudes toward male and female roles in the home and the marketplace;

-- provide counseling opportunities for married couples and those approaching marriage on the principles of responsible parenthood;

-- build understanding of the problems posed to society by the rapidly growing population of the world, and of the need to place personal decisions concerning childbearing in a context of the well-being of the community;

-- provide to each pregnant woman accessibility to comprehensive health care and nutrition adequate to ensure healthy children;

-- make information and materials available so all can exercise responsible choice in the area of conception controls. We support the free flow of information about reputable, efficient, and safe nonprescription contraceptive techniques through educational programs and through periodicals, radio, television, and other advertising media. We support adequate public funding and increased participation in family planning services by public and private agencies, including church-related institutions, with the goal of making such services accessible to all, regardless of economic status or geographic location [emphasis added];

-- make provision in law and in practice for voluntary sterilization as an appropriate means, for some, for conception control and family planning;

- safeguard the legal option of abortion under standards of sound medical practice;
- make abortions available to women without regard to economic standards of sound medical practice, and make abortions available to women without regard to economic status;
- monitor carefully the growing genetic and biomedical research, and be prepared to offer sound ethical counsel to those facing birth-planning decisions affected by such research;
- assist the states to make provisions in law and in practice for treating as adults minors who have, or think they have, venereal diseases, or female minors who are, or think they are, pregnant, thereby eliminating the legal necessity for notifying parents or guardians prior to care and treatment. Parental support is crucially important and most desirable on such occasions, but needed treatment ought not be contingent on such support. This statement shall not be used to assert or imply that The United Methodist Church opposes any requirements, with or without exceptions, of parental notification for abortion procedures performed on girls who have not yet reached the age of legal adulthood;
- understand the family as encompassing a wider range of options than that of the two-generational unit of parents and children (the nuclear family); and promote the development of all socially responsible and life-enhancing expressions of the extended family, including families with adopted children, single parents, those with no children, and those who choose to be single;
- view parenthood in the widest possible framework, recognizing that many children of the world today desperately need functioning parental figures, and also understanding that adults can realize the choice and fulfillment of parenthood through adoption or foster care;
- encourage men and women to actively demonstrate their responsibility by creating a family context of nurture and growth in which the children will have the opportunity to share in the mutual love and concern of their parents; and
- be aware of the fears of many in poor and minority groups and in developing nations about imposed birth-planning, oppose any coercive use of such policies and services, and strive to see that family-planning programs respect the dignity of each individual person as well as the cultural diversities of groups."

(That is the end of my quoted material.)

So, The United Methodist Church and many denominations I've mentioned are in favor of keeping abortion safe, legal, and accessible, limiting unwanted pregnancies, improving healthcare outcomes for all women, and supporting those who do want to bring a pregnancy to term.

I would go so far as to say that the “Access Without Apology” slate of pro-active reproductive health bills put forth not long ago by Ohio Democratic representatives is directly in line with the goals stated here from The United Methodist Church law.

In previous testimony against these bills, I have focused on RCRC, an organization started in 1973; but I felt that today you must hear from one of RCRC’s founding members, and my own and the largest Mainline Christian denomination, with hope that our hundreds of years of considering these issues, and their culmination into law, might speak to you. We are a “big tent” Christian denomination, with vastly different views on divisive social issues, and even the color of carpeting in our sanctuaries, and yet this is where we stand: firmly pro-choice, in the best sense of the word. I also deeply believe, and have seen this repeatedly as a pastor, that when it comes down to it -- to the tough decisions that need to be made within our private lives, among our family members and our doctors and pastors -- we all agree more than we think. But those morally nuanced, individual, private decisions cannot be legislated. It’s a matter of whether women and families receive adequate healthcare services in a safe and caring environment, or whether “safe and caring” healthcare is considered a luxury for only women of means.

I urge you to set an example and step out in faith in a party that is increasingly under fire for being out of touch on issues the American public has already embraced including safe and legal abortion, and LGBT rights, so we who feel so called are freed of this age-old fight so we might go feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and sometimes pick out that new carpeting for the sanctuary. But let’s not keep fighting this old battle. It’s time to move on and get on with the business of loving one another.

It is loving our neighbor to send a scared young woman on a cross-state journey to knock on a secret gate, blindfolded, to receive an abortion in an unsanitary environment? No.

My maternal grandmother later in her life told us that in the 1940s, she took a cab, by herself, to East Columbus and had an abortion on a kitchen table. Just my Nana, a mother already, and a man, alone in his house. Can you imagine your mother or grandmother going through this? Or your daughter or granddaughter?

My Nana, who went on to have four more children and rear them in a big house in Old Worthington -- children who went on to do many good things -- had a time in her life when she had to make a difficult decision, for whatever reason, and she did make that choice. Whether legal or not, safe or not, affordable or not, it had to be done. This has gone on since the beginning of time; it’s just a matter of whether we’re going to make it a humane or an inhumane experience.

Maybe you had a grandmother like that; or maybe you had one who never told you her secrets because we live in a society where women are shamed and left, often on their own, like my grandmother, to pick up the pieces for a species born to enjoy sex with the bodies God gave them. Many who even are forced suffer the consequences of non-consensual sex: rape. We must do everything we can to ensure women are not left alone, holding the bag for our entire species’ reproductive health needs.

By all means, don't hurt women in this state by reducing their access to healthcare, which is what this bill effectively does. At the foundation of most faith traditions is the love of God and neighbor. Limiting comprehensive reproductive health care is not loving, it is oppressing. Help our religious communities demonstrate how to love all of our neighbors in ways that don't infringe on anyone's religious freedom.

I was left holding the bag once. In the late '80s, as a junior at the University of Michigan; I was headed to law school, motivated and ambitious -- it was the era of L.A. Law! I was a member of the College Republicans -- helped get the first Republican mayor elected in Ann Arbor. That was a feat! I had a birth control failure, and at about five weeks gestation, had an abortion, under general anesthesia, in a Flint hospital, by an ob/gyn who delivered three babies in our family, paid for by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. Talk about a humane, dignified, shame-free, safe experience. I was lucky. I was able to take control of my life and live as God created me to live, living up to my full potential. I likely wouldn't have done this, had I had a child during college. I later married a man I met in law school and we married and had two beautiful children. One is a sophomore at the great school up the street. He's a Buckeye, but I still love him.

Women make difficult choices, and they are moral choices made with our moral autonomy, considering that we have bodily autonomy. You must respect my grandmother, and me, and every woman God created, to make that choice when she needs to for whatever her reason might be.

You must not, based on a minority religious view condemning abortion, use your power over funding decisions to reduce a woman's ability to plan the direction of her life so she may use all the gifts and graces God bestowed upon her.

I ask that you reject Senate Bill 294 and continue to support our partner, Planned Parenthood, in improving the lives of Ohioans.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.