

Testimony of Rachel D'Amico
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Opposing House Bill 294
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Hello, my name is Rachel D'Amico, I grew up in Cincinnati, and am currently a second year medical student at the Ohio State University College of Medicine. Chairman Coley, Ranking Minority Member Yuko, and members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak with you today, to voice my opposition to House Bill 294.

In the last two years, I've learned about the beauty and complexity of the human body, and how unpredictable and self-destructive it can be if not treated well. But another vital component of my medical education has been learning about the realities of our health care system and, as a future physician, it is my duty to stand up for quality care.

I am here today because our health care system is limiting the care that many patients need. Many physicians will no longer accept new Medicare and Medicaid patients due to repayment concerns. Physicians may deny prescription birth control to patients based on the physicians' moral views, not the patients' needs, and are not obliged to refer patients to a health care provider who will. In Ohio, there are no laws about comprehensive health education so many students, like me, leave high school being taught only one birth control method - abstinence.

Planned Parenthood is an organization that serves our community by filling these gaps in our current health care environment. In 2015 alone, Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio provided over 47,000 sexually transmitted infection tests, and served 2,780 individuals through infant mortality reduction programs¹. Although a common argument I hear against Planned Parenthood is that women can receive those services elsewhere, in reality, that's not true for everyone. Planned Parenthood is the most widespread and well-known advocate for reproductive health. Planned Parenthood is a name that, for many women, brings assurance that they can get quality, inexpensive, nonjudgmental healthcare. Of low-income women who received contraceptive care at publicly supported clinics in 2010, more than one third used Planned Parenthood². In Ohio, there are seven counties where Planned Parenthood is the only publicly funded clinic that provides contraceptive services³.

Defunding health centers overnight that serve thousands of people in Ohio, will create an immediate crisis in health care access. In a health care system that is already overworked, other community centers are not equipped to serve so many more patients. In Texas, where Planned Parenthood was defunded in 2012, there was an 81% increase in the caseload for community clinics⁴. Despite this increase in the other clinics' services, there was still a 23% decrease in Medicaid wellness exam claims and 38% decline in contraceptive claims from 2012 to 2013⁵. That means fewer cancer screenings, treatments for sexually transmitted diseases, and fewer women with reliable birth control. Already in the state of Ohio, 55% of all pregnancies in 2010 were unintended⁶, and there were over

54,000 cases of chlamydia reported to the Ohio Department of Health in 2014⁷. Ohio cannot afford to lose more healthcare providers. Of the 28 Planned Parenthoods throughout Ohio, only 3 provide abortions⁸.

I ask that we pause for a moment and try to look past the heated politics and emotion that surround abortion, because it is not relevant to this bill. No state or federal funding goes to abortion. This is about testing and treating sexually transmitted diseases, sexual education, birth control, and cancer screenings. I think we should all be able to agree that these are important services that Ohio women need easy access to.

Everyone here has their constituents' best interests at heart. And while abortion is a complicated, difficult topic, this discussion is actually fairly straightforward. If we truly want to decrease the number of abortions in Ohio, then we must increase spending on sexual education and birth control, not take away from it. If we are serious about decreasing healthcare spending, we must make it easier, not harder, for both men and women to be treated for sexually transmitted diseases early, before disease spreads and causes long-term complications. If we are going to fight a war on cancer, in the shadow of our beautiful James Cancer Hospital, we need to provide widespread access to breast exams and Pap smears, instead of making screening more difficult. Ohio women need these services- they need Planned Parenthood, and they need you to vote no on House Bill 294. Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions the committee members have.

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