

HB258 opposition testimony from Elaine Schleiffer

Chairman Burke, Ranking Minority Member Tavares, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in front of you today. My name is Elaine Schleiffer. I live in the city of Cleveland, and I serve on the board of directors of Preterm Clinic. We are Ohio's largest independent abortion provider. We also provide sexual health care including sexually transmitted infection screenings, birth control, wellness screenings like pap smears, and LGBTQ+ health care services. We provide these services because all of these services together help members of our community choose when and how to grow their families in the way that's best for them. Abortion is an integral part of the comprehensive sexual health care we provide.

I have told my abortion story in front of this body several times. I show up in this building as often as iterations of the "heartbeat bill" abortion ban do. I tell this committee, each of you, and your staffers the story of how a failing relationship, failing health, and losing my job backed me into a corner. I tell you how accessing abortion care gave me back my agency, gave me back my self respect, and gave me the opportunity to write a different future for myself and my family.

My story is not so different from the other thousands of Ohio women who come to Preterm every year. We are, all of us, trying to make decisions that will benefit our futures. All of us who choose abortion are choosing it because it enables us to make other choices too: to provide for our families, to pursue better economic outcomes, to preserve our health, to control our bodies.

My abortion made me safer. My abortion gave me the ability to increase my earning power. My abortion gave me back my physical health. My abortion gave me control over my body and my future.

I live in Cleveland, where some neighborhoods have higher lead poisoning rates than Flint, Michigan; where the public schools struggle with the burdens of homelessness, food insecurity, and poverty that children bear; where the maternal death rate, the rates of STIs, and the rates of poverty-related illnesses are shockingly high even though we share physical space with world renowned health care providers. My community needs safety. My community needs a healthier environment. My community needs improved access to physical and mental health care. My community needs more resources, not fewer. My community needs greater access to reproductive health care, not more gatekeeping and increased restrictions.

I am asking you, as my legislators, to treat me with the same dignity and respect that my abortion provider did. I am asking you to center the needs of Ohioans in your decision making, instead of the needs of lobbyists and national political strategists. The "heartbeat bill" abortion ban does not serve Ohioans. I ask you to vote against it in service of Ohioans like me, and the thousands of my neighbors that Preterm serves every year.

Thank you for hearing me.