



UNITE FOR REPRODUCTIVE & GENDER EQUITY

Sarah Inskeep

Opponent Testimony Ohio House Resolution 180

Ohio House Health Committee

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Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in opposition to House Resolution 180.

My name is Sarah Inskeep and I am the Ohio State Policy and Movement Building Director for Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity, also known as URGE. URGE is a reproductive justice organization powered by young people – particularly young people of color and LGBTQ+ young people – in Southern and Midwestern states. That includes our work here in Ohio.

At URGE, we envision a world where all people can live, love, create families, express our gender, and enjoy sexuality with liberation, power, and joy and without discrimination, stigma, or interference. It is with these values, and on behalf of our hundreds of members in Ohio, that I urge you to vote no on House Resolution 180.

House Resolution 180 is misguided and rooted in stigma, shame, and misinformation about sex and sexuality. Credentialed public health organizations like the World Health Organization, the United States Center for Disease Control, the Ohio Department of Health, and the American Public Health Association **have not** declared pornography as a public health crisis. According to an article in the American Public Health Association Journal published in January of this year, researchers determined that based on evidence and qualities outlined in the Oxford Handbook of Public Health Practice that pornography **does not** meet the criteria of a public health crisis.ⁱ

This resolution is yet another politically-motivated diversion from prioritizing support for communities in Ohio that are experiencing real-life crises such as high rates of Black infant mortality, rampant opioid addiction, and loss of loved ones and community members because of senseless gun violence. Just yesterday the Franklin County Coroner reported that nearly thirty people have died in the last ten days because of fatal fentanyl overdoses.ⁱⁱ These are areas that the credentialed public health organizations named previously have identified as rising to the level and urgency of public health crises. Where are the resolutions and legislation to address these immediate, tangible needs of Ohioans?

Emily F. Rotham, a Professor of Community Health Studies at the Boston University School of Public Health and expert in sexuality studies, was interviewed by WOSU's Ann Fisher about this resolution. When asked about her research on the topic she reiterated the importance of



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centering evidenced-based research and randomized control trials when creating health policy and prevention initiatives to effectively address issues such as sexual violence and exploitation of young people. Rotham concluded that there is no evidence that identified pornography as something that perpetuates these public health problems.ⁱⁱⁱ

Public health experts like Rotham point to access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive education and health care services as being the most effective prevention strategies to deploy. Yet, Ohio is the only state in the nation without health education standards.^{iv} Young people in the state deserve factual, comprehensive, and affirming information about sex and sexuality. Repeated studies have found that abstinence-only education (often referred to as “sexual risk avoidance”) and shaming the sexual lives of young people is highly ineffective and fails to arm them with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate healthy relationships and explore their own sexuality.^v House Resolution 180 would not only move the needed in the wrong direction, but also reinforce negative and untrue stereotypes about young people and sex.

Last year, the Health Policy Institute of Ohio released a Health Policy Dashboard report which ranked Ohio as being 46 out of the 50 states and District of Columbia on the health value, which is a composite measure of population health outcomes and healthcare spending, landing the state in the bottom quartile.^{vi} Ohio continues to fall behind the rest of the country in health outcomes, especially for people of color, Black folks, nonbinary individuals, rural communities, people with low-incomes, and young people.

House Resolution 180 is not an effective or productive use of state resources or legislators’ time. It is an insult to people across the state who face actual public health crises. It attempts to further a false narrative that sex, sexuality, and pleasure is anything other than normal and should be explored given factual, comprehensive, and culturally-informed information.

Politicians, who are not public health experts, should not be asserting this inflammatory and stigmatizing notion that pornography is a public health crisis. For these reasons, I urge you to vote no and ultimately stop House Resolution 180. Thank you again for allowing me to testify and I’m happy to answer any questions you have.

ⁱ Kimberly M. Nelson and Emily F. Rothman, 2020: Should Public Health Professionals Consider Pornography a Public Health Crisis? *American Journal of Public Health* **110**, 151_153, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305498>

ⁱⁱ WOSU Media, *Franklin County Coroner Laments ‘Sad Week’ After Rash of Overdose Deaths*, <https://radio.wosu.org/post/franklin-county-coroner-laments-sad-week-after-rash-overdose-deaths#stream/0>

ⁱⁱⁱ WOSU Media, *Porn as a Public Health Crisis*, <https://radio.wosu.org/post/porn-public-health-crisis#stream/0>



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^{iv} Ohio Department of Education, *Health Education*, <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Health-Education>

^v SEICUS, *Don't be Fooled: "Sexual Risk Avoidance" is "Abstinence-Only-Until- Marriage*, <https://siecus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Nay-to-SRA-1-pager-May-2019-Update.pdf>

^{vi} Health Policy Institute of Ohio, *2019 Health Value Dashboard*, https://www.healthpolicyohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019HealthValueDashboard_Snapshot_Final.pdf