



Jaime Miracle
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House Bill 55 Proponent Testimony
House Government Oversight Committee
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Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, my name is Jaime Miracle, and I am the Deputy Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio. I am sending in this written testimony in support of House Bill 55 on behalf of our more than 50,000 members and activists. I would certainly rather be joining you in the committee room deliver this testimony in person, but unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic continues to rage on, and the lack of safety protocols in place in the Statehouse means that coming into the building to testify is not a safe endeavor at this moment. Which is the whole reason for H.B. 55, to allow folks to testify without risking the health and safety of themselves and their families.

Testifying before the Ohio legislature is something that should be held as a sacred right for all in our democracy. It should not be something reserved just for the healthy, rich, able-bodied Ohioan. Even before the pandemic, this was not a reality in our state. Having to travel hours to get to Columbus, lost wages because of lost work time, missing school, finding extra childcare are all barriers that existed well before we ever heard of COVID-19.

I have been coming to the Ohio Statehouse to testify for over a decade now, and to be honest hadn't really thought of the lack of accessibility inside the building until a few years ago when I broke my ankle, meaning I was on crutches for several months. Having to navigate the building on crutches gave me a whole new perspective on the building we call "The People's House." This building was nearly impossible for me to navigate without assistance.

Now, on top of all of the obstacles that have been around for decades Ohioans have to risk contracting a deadly virus if they want to have their voices heard by members of the Ohio Legislature. Last year as the pandemic began states across this country put policies in place to allow for virtual testimony for the public and virtual participation for members. In fact, 28 states put such policies in place in 2020 according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.¹ Cities across our state have created ways for public testimony virtually. Since the emergency was declared last year, we have testified virtually multiple times before Columbus City Council and Toledo City Council. This process allowed advocates to have their voices heard about the issue at hand while simultaneously ensuring the safety of our staff and volunteers.

Every day, in this building, legislators and others are consistently unmasked and not following CDC guidelines for health and safety. It is completely unacceptable that, a year after the pandemic began, people are still having to risk their health, and the health of their families, to come to the statehouse to be heard before this body. Virtual testimony is easy. It makes The People's House really The People's House. It should have been implemented last year, but now you have the power to right that wrong and pass H.B. 55 to finally make virtual testimony a reality.

Please pass H.B. 55.

¹ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/covid-19-state-actions-related-to-legislative-operations.aspx>