

May 24, 2022

Government Oversight Committee  
Opponent Written Testimony  
Senate Bill 598  
Jan Nesor

Chairperson Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Ohio Government Oversight Committee,

I write to you in opposition to HB 598. My name is Jan Nesor. By profession I am a university professor. I make this statement in solidarity with the doctors and staff of abortion clinics, and with the women across the state who depend on them for access to reproductive services.

As you are well aware, passing HB 598 would trigger a ban on all abortions in Ohio when the United States Supreme Court releases its decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*.

Such a ban undermines the health and bodily autonomy of millions of Ohioans, in particular those already left vulnerable by the lack of an adequate public health system. It endangers the health of pregnant patients by interfering with a doctor's ability to treat medical conditions, even if those conditions are not related to their pregnancy. As groups such as the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists have stated, abortion is a time-sensitive procedure and delays in access, for example, those caused by forcing women to travel long distances to states without abortion bans, can have serious negative consequences and increase risks to the patient. For women unable to make such trips, the medical risks are obviously even greater. To deny abortion access altogether is tantamount to the state reaching into the woman's body to take control of her life. It is an assault on both her health and basic human dignity.

The rationale for such acts is ultimately religious. I spent this morning, and have spent a morning pretty much every other week for the past four years, a volunteer escort at an abortion clinic, doing a 3-hour shift. I speak for myself, and not for other escorts, whose views may differ from mine. Basically my role is to walk patients into the building and get between them and the protestors if they feel intimidated. The protestors, sometimes only a handful, often more than a dozen, circulate around the perimeter of the facility. Some simply pray or chat with one another. Others harass and harangue women and staff entering and leaving the clinic, shouting through bullhorns or voice amplifiers, photographing them with GoPros. The protestors' arguments are invariably grounded in fundamentalist religious beliefs. They obviously have the legal right to express such views. But HB 598 is an instrument that allows them to impose those views on others.

As such, a ban such as HB 598 entails has implications far beyond the clinic. A more accurate description would be that it is a "forced birth" bill that undermines core values, including basic rights to privacy, bodily autonomy, and indeed liberty. The draft of Justice Alito's ruling leaves no zone of privacy around the family - contraception, even choice of a partner is implicitly

subject to state regulation. By congealing such positions in state law, the ban entailed by HB 598 undermines the basic right to control one's body and marks another step towards an authoritarian state. A central question here is: Do you think women are rational beings who can make their own decisions regarding their bodies and their futures, or do you believe that a woman is merely, as the legal scholar Katherine Franke phrases it, "a potentially irrational vessel for a future person, and really needs the paternalistic guidance of the state"? HB 598 implies the latter.

Indeed, a broader issue here is whether you think the people of Ohio are rational beings. This is a basic issue of democratic process. According to a Pew Research Poll earlier this year 59% of Americans think abortion should be legal in most or all cases. An ABC poll last week showed that over 80% think abortions should be legal if the woman's health is in danger. HB 598 clearly does not represent the will of the people.

Passing HB 598 would undermine the ability of women to lead free and fulfilling lives with dignity and autonomy. Even if the federal law on abortion were to change and allow states to ban abortion, Ohio must protect the health and equality of its citizens. I urge you to vote no on HB 598.

Sincerely,

Jan Nesor

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