

Hello, Chairperson Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to House Bill 598. My name is Jessica Stein. I'm representing myself. I am from Columbus, Ohio. I'm a mother of three, a political science major, an abortion advocate, a grassroots organizer, a feminist and most importantly, I've had an abortion. An abortion that saved not only my sanity, but my life.

So, contrary to the gross and inaccurate rhetoric that is passed around amongst groups like the ones who support this inhumane bill, people who have abortions aren't monsters or murderers. We're human beings who want the right to choose when or if we become parents. We're human beings who just want to be in control of their own bodies. Above all else, we are human beings and deserve to be treated as such.

I'd like to start out by pointing out that per the Geneva convention, forced pregnancy is a war crime and a crime against humanity. Forced pregnancy is defined as "the unlawful confinement of a woman forcibly made pregnant with the intent of affecting the ethnic composition of any population or carrying out any grave violations of international law." Now, you might be wondering why I am citing the Geneva Convention, and do not worry, I will explain shortly. My question to you, is why are the elected officials who are supposed to represent us attempting to carry out war crimes on their own citizens?

The reason that I made sure to include "with the intent of affecting the ethnic composition of any population" is because it is clear that this bill is not only targeting the already marginalized citizens of this state, but it is steeped in racism. The white population's death rate has exceeded its birth rate. And white babies are the most sought after in the adoption process. This bill is not pro life, this bill is pro forced birth and pro white supremacy. This bill treats human babies as commodities, and the people forced to birth them as incubators. I'm a lot of things, but I am not an incubator for a rich, white couple looking for a baby they can pass off as their own.

Furthermore, the people of Ohio are not blind to the fact that this will keep more of us impoverished. It will force us to live here, even if we want to move because of the draconian and discriminatory laws that are being passed. What happened to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?" We can't exactly have any of those things if we're trapped in a cycle of poverty, used as incubators, and being told by elected officials that we have "an opportunity to help a child become a productive human being" after being raped.

Remember that abortion I told you about at the beginning of my testimony? It was due to my being a victim of rape. And I can tell you with certainty that neither I, nor that fetus would've been productive to anyone. I was traumatized, and the last thing I needed was someone telling me it was my duty to raise my rapist's child. I was already a mother, and was struggling financially. You cannot honestly tell me that by forcing me to carry my rapist's child, that I, or the child I already had, would've been better off. I can tell you honestly, I would not be here if I'd have not had access to a safe and legal abortion. My abortion saved my life. It saved me from carrying a rapist's child, from being tied to a rapist for the rest of my life, from financial strain of having a child I couldn't afford while dealing with trauma, it saved me.

Now back to the fact that this bill is completely unconstitutional, cruel, and stripping Ohioans of basic human rights. Per the 14th amendment: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges

or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” By banning abortion, you are depriving people in Ohio of life, and liberty. As used in Constitution, liberty means freedom from arbitrary and unreasonable restraint upon an individual. I’d argue that committing crimes against humanity against a person is definitely an unreasonable restraint. You can’t have liberty if you’re forced to carry a child you don’t want, are trapped into poverty, or are born to parents that didn’t want you. You definitely can’t have liberty if politicians and an extreme religious minority try to frame your rape as an “opportunity” instead of making sure we have comprehensive sexual education, access to birth control and abortion, and access to mental health services.

And life? This ban will cause people to die. Abortion is a valid and necessary medical procedure. It should be accessible and affordable, not stigmatized and outlawed. You won’t ever stop abortion, you’ll stop safe abortions. If this bill passes, you’ll be damning a lot of Ohioans. Make no mistake, this bill is not pro life, it’s forced birth, and it’s pro dehumanization.

If any of the proponents to this bill, or the politicians that introduced this bill were pro life, they’d vote and make policy a lot differently than they do. They’d enact policies that protect trans and queer kids, they’d introduce laws to protect people of color, they’d vote to fund social programs and schools, they’d worry about the mental health of Ohioans, they’d LISTEN to 70% of their constituents who are pro abortion. They would’ve wore masks, and encouraged vaccinations. They’d remember that they’re supposed to represent and work FOR THE PEOPLE, not push their own agendas. I urge you to vote no on House Bill 598

I would like to thank the committee for taking the time to hear my testimony, and ask them to take my experiences, and the consequences Ohioans would face if a bill like this is passed under serious consideration. Thank you.

Jes Stein
She/Her