

Chairperson Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brow, and members of the Ohio House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to House Bill 598. I wish I had the opportunity to speak to you in person and there wasn't a limit on testimony for a bill that would impact so many Ohioans. My name is Lauren Blauvelt-Copelin, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs and Public Advocacy of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio.

I want to be clear—banning abortion is contrary to what the majority of Ohioans want, and it will result in a human rights crisis here in our state. Ohioans believe that their neighbors should have the right to access abortion, something House Bill 598 would make impossible and illegal. On May 14<sup>th</sup>, over 15,000 Ohioans showed up across the state to fight for abortion rights and demand better policies for our communities. If you pass this bill and take away individuals' rights to make their own decisions about their bodies and their futures, it will be in direct contradiction to the will and well-being of your constituents..

House Bill 598 would ban abortion in Ohio at any stage of pregnancy, and it would do so without providing exceptions for particularly vulnerable patients, like those who have been the victims of rape or sexual assault. What's more, this bill would not only penalize doctors, but any person who "personally furnishes" an abortion-inducing drug to a pregnant individual.

This abortion ban, like all restrictions on abortion, will fall hardest on those in our state who are already most marginalized, particularly Black, Latino, Indigenous people, people with low incomes, people with disabilities, and people living in rural areas. As a result of systemic racism in the U.S. health care system, Black women already face substantial barriers to accessing care. If it is enacted, House Bill 598 would further burden that access, and make it nearly, if not entirely impossible for these patients and others to get the reproductive health care they need.

Access to abortion hinges not only on navigating the procedure's financial cost but also on managing the logistical barriers—childcare, time off work, and travel costs—posed by medically unnecessary restrictions. These barriers will grow exponentially if this bill goes into effect and Ohioans are forced to travel out of state to obtain care. For patients who already struggle to make ends meet, these barriers may be too much to overcome.

Lawmakers have no business making personal decisions that should be left to a patient to make on their own, with consultation from a doctor. But HB 598 would interfere with the doctor-patient relationship, even in situations where the patient's life is at risk.

While there is an affirmative defense for a physician who prevents the death of their patient, that is insufficient to ensure that patients who need care will be able to receive it. As written, this bill would—first—require *two* physicians to agree that an abortion is necessary, which could create delays in treating a patient. Second, the bill would still subject physicians who provide abortion to save a patient's life to criminal prosecution and force them to explain the necessity of this care in court, under the threat felony penalties. No health care professional should have to face criminal charges for saving the life of their patient. But that's exactly the scenario that this bill would create.

Regardless of our skin color, where we live, or where we're from, everyone should have the freedom and power to control their own body, decisions, and lives. *We all* benefit when we all have access to affordable health care. Despite this fact, anti-abortion politicians have focused continuously on making it more difficult for Ohioans to access care and have relentlessly sought to strip us of our right to an abortion. In the last 10 years, this legislature has enacted over 30 restrictions on abortion. Ohioans deserve policies that make our communities safe, and the members of this committee should be focused on that—not on advancing laws that put people's lives and families at risk.

Contrary to what the proponents of this bill assert, abortion bans like this one do nothing to protect Ohioans or increase safety. Rather, the legislators supporting this bill want to deny Ohioans their fundamental rights and end abortion access in this state, plain and simple.

We've already gotten a preview of what a post-Roe world could look like in the wake of Texas's Senate Bill 8—a ban on abortion at six weeks of pregnancy. That draconian law has left more than 7 million people of reproductive age—10% of U.S. people of reproductive age—living in a state where abortion is effectively outlawed and inaccessible for many. If the proponents of this bill get their way, this will likely be the reality in Ohio. We cannot and will not accept a world where safe, legal reproductive health care depends on what state you live in.

Most Ohioans, like most Americans, support the right to abortion and oppose overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Despite this public support, increasingly conservative anti-abortion politicians—put into office in no small part because of extreme gerrymandering in our state—have pushed for more and more stringent restrictions on abortion access in Ohio. Among the restrictions that are currently in effect are a ban on abortion after 20 weeks, a medically unnecessary ultrasound requirement, and other unjustified requirements that make it harder for patients to access care. Legislators also passed a law that allows health care providers to deny patients essential care—including abortion—based on their personal objections. These efforts, which undermine the health and well-being of Ohioans and families, have moved forward in service of national anti-abortion organizations' ultimate goals: to defy the will of the public, reverse *Roe*, and ban abortion.

Ohioans elected legislators to keep their communities safe. Instead of increasing access to health care and passing bills that address the maternal and infant mortality

crisis, anti-abortion legislators are stripping Ohioans of their reproductive health care. Ohioans deserve better. Ohioans deserve lawmakers who are focused on improving their lives, not restricting their access to care. That's why we ask you to listen to the thousands of people who marched in the street two weeks ago, and who will go to the polls in November.

Planned Parenthood is fighting for an Ohio where abortion access doesn't depend on your zip code or income, and we will always stand with the patients who turn to our health centers for essential care. Abortion care is still legal and available in Ohio, and Planned Parenthood will work to ensure that this vital care remains accessible to every single person who needs it.

I urge you to vote no on House Bill 598.