



HB 598 Opposition Testimony

Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to voice our opposition to this bill.

My name is Maria Bruno, my pronouns are she/her or they/them, and I am the Public Policy Director of Equality Ohio, a statewide organization dedicated to educating about and advocating for lived and legal equality for LGBTQ+ Ohioans.

Equality Ohio is fervently against HB 598, and we ask this committee to vote no.

Roe v. Wade has been the law of the land for almost 50 years, and it is a part of the fabric of this country. This bill would take our state back to a time with less freedom and higher maternal mortality rates. It's wrong for Ohio, and it is not what voters want.

Despite this precedent and Americans' consistent support for *Roe*, lawmakers in this state continue to introduce bills this session aimed at restricting access to safe and legal abortion.

This sets a dangerous legal precedent—particularly for the LGBTQ+ community. HB 598 puts Ohio on the road to legal chaos. Picking and choosing when legal precedent matters—and which foundational constitutional rights deserve preservation and which don't—is a recipe for disaster. **“Trigger” laws are legal anomalies that are unparalleled in any other area of constitutional law.** Trigger laws like this open the door to reversing the many LGBTQ+ equality gains that have resulted from important constitutional cases over the past decades.

At first glance, abortion rights might seem like a distinct legal issue from LGBTQ+ rights. But LGBTQ+ people need this healthcare, and LGBTQ+ rights and abortion rights are tightly entwined together through case law precedent. Important cases such as *Lawrence v. Texas*, which decriminalized intimate acts between consenting same-sex adults, and *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which recognized marriage as a fundamental right including LGBTQ+ people, are both rooted in a fundamental right to privacy.

Voters don't support this. There is bipartisan support to preserve *Roe v. Wade*. Nearly three-quarters of Americans—72 percent—do not want to see *Roe v. Wade* overturned. This includes a majority of Democrats, Independants, *and* Republicans. Americans



simply don't believe that politicians should be making personal decisions for people about their pregnancies.

The polling makes clear that Americans want abortion to be a safe and legal experience for patients. Politicians who try to block access to abortion are not only on the wrong side of reproductive justice, they are also on the wrong side of public opinion. HB 598 simply goes too far in inserting government into our personal, private lives.

Abortions are important. For safety, family planning, and economic justice. *Roe* wasn't the beginning of abortion in America—rather, it allowed people to access abortion legally and prevented people dying from unsafe, illegal abortion. Taking away this right to healthcare freedom and bodily autonomy by banning abortion will not prevent abortions—it will only prevent safe ones. According to the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists “decreasing women’s access to abortion will likely increase negative health outcomes and complications, including maternal and infant mortality.”

Even people who *want* a pregnancy are sometimes unable to carry a pregnancy to term for reasons related to their health, financial, or living situation. But this bill removes family planning options and forces people to carry a pregnancy to term whether or not they can do so safely or without severe financial hardship.

This is an extreme bill that risks Ohioans' lives for political gain and uses a dangerous legal mechanism that would let legislators pick and choose what constitutional precedent matters. This bill affects important life decisions that should be made by individuals in consultation with their doctors, their families, and their faith, and **not** extremist politicians. Ohioans' health and lives should not be used as political pawns.

I urge you to vote NO on HB 598. Thank you.

*Maria Bruno, Public Policy Director
Equality Ohio*