

Chairperson Wilkin, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Ohio House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony in vehement opposition to HB 598. My name is Shakti Rambarran and I am a resident of Athens, Ohio.

I urge you to vote no on HB 598 which would immediately ban all abortions in OH if SCOTUS allows states to ban or further restrict abortion access. This would immediately harm over 2.5 million Ohioans — especially Ohioans from lower income backgrounds, Ohioans of color, Disabled Ohioans, and rural Ohioans. We already know *Roe* afforded legal right to abortion rather than guaranteed access, as there are numerous notable barriers in OH for abortion access already. HB 598 would strip countless Ohioans of their freedoms over their bodies and their futures. Abortion is health care. All people should have the power and control over their bodies, including if and when they are pregnant. Decisions around whether or not a person should get an abortion or what kind of abortion they should get should remain people and their trusted health care providers - without outside interference.

To further demonstrate why we need less abortion restrictions and more abortion access, please allow me to share *one* abortion story - my abortion story.

I had an abortion. And it was, and continues to be, the decision that was undeniably right for me. A little while back, I was on a form of birth control which is more than 99% effective. Yet, it failed and I found myself unintentionally and unwillingly pregnant. Medically unnecessary barriers to abortion care forced me to remain pregnant for over 2 weeks despite me taking immediate action after discovering I was pregnant. Some of these barriers included the mandated 24 hour waiting period (so I couldn't have my abortion as soon as I saw my provider), requiring the same provider who does the consultation to perform the abortion (which caused a week delay in between my consultation and the soonest appointment available), and requiring pregnant people open a document to state how far into their pregnancy they are and if the likelihood of carrying the pregnancy to term without having the abortion (where the website "glitched", failed to record that I opened and read it, and left my abortion providers unable to perform my abortion despite me telling them everything the document said and needing to schedule my abortion for the next available time - another week out).

I had to navigate countless barriers to get the healthcare I needed. Throughout it all, one of my biggest struggles was that *my body was violently rejecting my pregnancy*. Specifically, I became incredibly sick with hyperemesis gravidarum — a severe pregnancy complication characterized by extreme nausea, weakness, and dehydration — that had me unable to eat or drink sufficiently, and vomiting bile multiple times a day every day for 2 weeks. To ease my nausea, doctors prescribed me nausea medicine that they described as being "just a notch below what [they'd] give chemo patients". Yet, I couldn't even keep those medicines down. Doctors tried even more medications and supplements but my body couldn't accept them. Quickly, I became alarmingly dehydrated and was on the verge of becoming hospitalized multiple times but withheld going to an ER because of extreme fear of medical bankruptcy.

I continued to hover around a meager 100lbs — which my doctors determined as unquestionably underweight. In just two weeks of pregnancy, I had dropped 10 lbs (over 10% of my body weight) and doctors were concerned and convinced that such rapid weight loss (and the accompanying malnourishment) would only continue unless a serious intervention took place. If that extreme sickness and rate of weight loss were maintained, I would have lost 20 lbs in just one month. Fortunately, once I

went through with the abortion, my symptoms went away almost immediately. Within an hour of my procedure, my nausea had completely disappeared and I was able to hold down 12oz of ginger beer and a tiny pack of saltine crackers. The first “meal” I had and kept down in two weeks. I remember crying tears of joy over what had seemed like such a major victory at the time. It felt like my body returned to me. And ever since that day, my body has continued to feel like mine — as it should.

More so, I remembered sobbing because it felt like my hopes and dreams for my life returned to me. Because of my abortion, I was able to further my education — getting my Masters in Public Health from Columbia University and my Masters in Science in Experimental Psychology from Ohio University. Because of my abortion, I’ve been able to financially plan and build a stronger future for myself, my loved ones, and my community. I am now able to have an emergency fund and savings not just for myself, but for my loved ones; this has allowed me to obtain other necessary medical care for myself and be able to manage my medical bills, it has allowed me to financially support loved ones when they faced housing insecurity because they couldn’t afford rent, and it has allowed me to invest in countless local initiatives as an active and invested community member. Because of my abortion, I’m able to be a better person for myself, my loved ones, and the communities I am a part of.

My abortion is always something I have looked back on with utmost confidence and relief. It is something I had never once felt a shred of doubt or regret over because I knew to my core that this was the right decision for me. People should be able to make the decisions that are right for them - including whether or not to have an abortion. I urge you to not interfere with their abilities to make private and personal health care decisions that are right for them. **I urge you to oppose HB 598.**

Thank you.

Shakti Rambarran