
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 260. My name is Lauren Blauvelt-Copelin, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs and Public Advocacy for Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio.

No matter our skin color, where we live, or where we're from, we all want accessible health care that keeps us safe and secure when we are in need. But, Ohio Republican politicians have continuously focused on stripping Ohioans of the right to make their own health care decisions, this time in the middle of a devastating pandemic. We all benefit when we all have access to affordable health care. Ohioans deserve legislators who are striving to improve the safety and security of our communities instead of promoting bills like this one. SB260 has no medical justification or benefit, and would only make it more difficult and more dangerous for our citizens to seek out health care.

Senate Bill 260 would ban abortions performed via telemedicine, which would cut off access to safe, legal abortion for patients who already have difficulty accessing a provider. Telemedicine abortions help us treat patients who live in rural communities and do not have access to necessary health care. With the number of abortion restrictions rising, the communities who are considered rural and far from our abortion providers has increased, and the need for telemedicine abortions along with it.

The importance of telemedicine has been displayed throughout the country this year. During the pandemic, while people, especially those who are sick, have had to stay home, telehealth has allowed patients to continue meeting with their doctors, getting diagnosed, and getting prescriptions. Telehealth is not the future of health care, it is the current state of health care. All fifty states, including Ohio, have recognized this by relaxing, not increasing, the number of telehealth restrictions in place during 2020.

Restricting health care in the middle of a devastating pandemic is cruel. With Ohioans from every part of the state suffering, our elected officials have done nothing to curb the pandemic's spread or to relieve their economic distress. What they *have* done instead is work on harmful bills like this and SB27 that will take away Ohioans' access to health care. SB 260 is especially dangerous to consider during a pandemic, as it will put our citizens at increased risk for contracting COVID-19 by requiring more unnecessary in-person visits to health centers.

Telemedicine abortions are extremely safe, and are utilized across the county without any decrease in safety to the patient, but that is not what this bill is about. If the fear was really about the safety of telemedicine, we would see other procedures called out, but we do not. Instead, we already have nine other bills proposed that aim to restrict abortion and shut down our clinics. We know that this bill's real aim is yet again to restrict a patient's right to choose what to do with their body.

For nearly two years, Planned Parenthood of Ohio has used telemedicine to provide medication abortions, safely and successfully serving more than 300 Ohioans. Telemedicine expands access to health care for patients located far away from health care providers. The ability of telemedicine to increase access to health care for patients living in remote areas is crucial, given the significant health disparities that exist between patients living in rural and urban areas.

Senate Bill 260 creates an additional barrier for populations currently struggling to access the health care they need. Safe, legal abortion is already difficult to access for Ohioans, particularly for Black people, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with low incomes, and individuals living in remote areas. While restrictive abortion bans like this are introduced to restrict all patient access, that is not what ends up happening. This ban would disproportionately impact those with disabilities who require additional resources to get to an abortion-providing health center if it is far away. It would impact Black communities who already bear the burden of disproportionately negative health care outcomes and maternal mortality rates due to systemic racism in our health care system and institutions. Bills like SB 260 only expand the dichotomy in care we see between the wealthy and the poor, urban and rural, and white and black. The bill would push equal access to safe, quality health care further out of reach.

With repeated measures restricting reproductive health care in Ohio, people in Ohio have less access to choice than ever before. Studies have shown that 8 in 10 Americans agree that abortion should be safe, legal, and accessible. People should be able to access the health care they need no matter who they are or where they live. Senate Bill 260 is not aimed at improving health care access or outcomes for Ohioans. The sole purpose is to further decrease access to safe, legal abortion. This is a tactic that has already been blocked by the courts. The Iowa Supreme Court declared a ban on telemedicine abortions to be unconstitutional in 2015 because of the lack of medical support for prohibiting it, noting that the Iowa Board of Medicine's medical concerns about telemedicine "are selectively limited to abortion." In Idaho, Planned Parenthood challenged a similar ban in 2017, which led a federal judge to prevent the state from enforcing the ban. Idaho's attorney general ultimately agreed that the law imposed "an undue burden on women's access to abortion and therefore violated the Fourteenth Amendment." Continuously passing unconstitutional bans on abortion is not only drastically affecting people's lives but is an irresponsible waste of taxpayer money.

No matter where someone lives, what they believe, how wealthy they are, or what race they are, we all deserve access to safe, quality health care. Ohio legislators should be focusing on expanding access to reproductive health care, not further restricting it. I urge you to vote no on Senate Bill 260, a dangerous telemedicine abortion ban. Thank you for hearing my testimony, and I welcome any questions you have for me.

Sincerely,

Lauren Blauvelt-Copelin
Vice President of Government Affairs and Public Advocacy
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio