

National Council of Jewish Women Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 260

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The National Council of Jewish Women opposes the passage of Senate Bill 260 because it imposes an undue burden on a woman seeking an abortion, especially during a pandemic. It also violates the First Amendment's religious freedom provision as it imposes a Christian interpretation on those of us who follow the Jewish religion – our faith puts the health and welfare of the mother before that of a fetus until birth.

The National Council of Jewish Women opposes SB 260 because, if it becomes law, it will endanger rather than protect the life of a woman. NCJW has fought to protect the lives of women, children and families for over 125 years nationally and over 100 in central Ohio. We have created programs and worked with the legislature on bills to prevent shaken baby syndrome and teen dating abuse prevention. We developed programs to protect women from being trafficked and have worked with the courts to help survivors of sex trafficking start new lives. We have created and supported programs to help new mothers, homeless families and aging adults. We have supported safe sex education and increased access to reproductive health care. NCJW cannot support legislation that creates an undue burden on individuals seeking reproductive health care, especially when that legislation violates our religious beliefs.

It's evident from the testimony of physicians' groups and the successful use of telemedicine during this pandemic that telemedicine is safe. Many of us have had internet visits with our physicians using equipment to enable secure electronic communication and exchange of information. After discussing our health issues, we have received prescriptions for medicine to help us. We can have medicine delivered and then we take the medicine as directed, without the physician in our house or we in his/her office while we take it. Telemedicine has allowed us to obtain good care and advice from our doctors in a safe, timely manner, something greatly appreciated at this time. Telemedicine also has been a life-saving resource in rural communities without enough health care practitioners.

Despite the results of a 4-state study published in the journal, *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, noting that outcomes are comparable between telemedicine and standard provisions of medical abortion, Senate Republicans have chosen again to ignore science, banning the provision of medication abortion via telemedicine. SB 260 also enforces criminal penalties on doctors, should medicine for the abortion be prescribed and taken without the doctor being present in the room. Now, the Ohio House of Representatives is contemplating voting for this bill, criminalizing medical professionals stretched to the limit because of a global pandemic.

SB 260 would deny individuals who are in an early stages of pregnancy the safety of a visit with a doctor over the Internet using equipment to enable secure electronic communication and exchange of information. Under current Ohio law designed to unnecessarily infringe on individuals' rights and create

barriers to safe, effective health care, she must be counseled and given information designed to discourage her from having an abortion at an in-person session 24 hours prior to an abortion procedure being provided to her. Right there, she would have had an opportunity to be exposed to someone carrying COVID-19, bringing with it the opportunity to get the disease and spread it to others in her household and beyond. SB 260 would require her to return and would require the doctor to be in the room with her when she takes the medicine. Telemedicine allows a woman to be able to access medication abortion without endangering herself or her family a second time.

There is no medical reason to require a women to return 24 hours after the required counseling session to have a medication abortion with the doctor present in the room when she takes the medicine. Instead, this is another roadblock for women to receive safe, legal abortions with no stated benefit to the woman or the health status of the community, but simply to create another barrier and inconvenience for women who feel an abortion is necessary for their well-being and/or health. It is also another way to criminalize and stigmatize a medical practitioner who provides abortions. In fact, Stephanie Ranade Krider, vice president of the Ohio Right to Life, was quoted as saying in January of 2020 that “telemedicine is becoming more common. Senate Bill 260 is a way to head off telemedicine abortionsⁱ.” In other words, this is a deliberate creation of a hardship, a burden for women seeking abortions and for the doctors providing them.

The Ohio State Senate voted 21 to 9 to impose this undue burden on women, but that was prior to Ohio attaining number 3 status in the country for increase in COVID-19 cases and deaths from said disease. At this time, it’s hard to believe that the members of the Ohio House of Representatives who call themselves “pro-life” are, when COVID-19 infections are surging in Ohio, contemplating passing a law to require in-person visits to punish and create an undue burden on women seeking abortion care and increase their risk of getting COVID-19 and passing it on to their families.

The National Council of Jewish Women, follows the basic rules of the Jewish religion in that we are working to better the world. Under the guidelines of our religion, we put the life of the living mother above the life that she carries until that life emerges from her womb. Until emergence, the fetus is considered a part of the woman. The fetus is regarded as a part of the mother’s body and not a separate being until it begins to egress from the womb during parturition (childbirth).

In our religion, the life of the mother comes before the life of the child to be born and in some instances, an abortion is acceptable. Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Murderer & Preservation 1:9 affirmed that the Sages ruled when it is dangerous for the mother, it is permitted to abort the fetus in her womb.

Protecting a life is paramount in Judaism. Telemedicine in the time of a pandemic or in rural areas where access to care is limited, protects women’s lives and guarantees their right to a safe and legal abortion. For that reason, we respectfully request a “no” vote on SB 260.

ⁱ Ohio Senate bill would ban abortions performed through telemedicine, By Laura Hancock, cleveland.com (01/21/2020) <https://www.cleveland.com/open/2020/01/ohio-senate-bill-would-ban-abortions-performed-through-telemedicine.htm>