

HB 679 Opponent Testimony

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Chairman Brinkman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Boggs, members of the Ohio House Insurance Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to House Bill 679. My name is Lauren Blauvelt-Copelin, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs and Public Advocacy for Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio.

Planned Parenthood is the largest nationwide reproductive health care provider. Planned Parenthood has been a trusted provider for over 100 years. With patient experience, need, and a strong commitment to quality and safety, Planned Parenthood continues to lead in advancing reproductive service delivery across the country and here in Ohio. Patients trust our nonjudgmental services to give them unbiased information. Patients are comfortable asking our providers questions and know they will receive unbiased information and support to help them make the best decision for them and their future.

For nearly two years, Planned Parenthood in 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 particularly important given the significant health disparities that exist between patients living in rural and urban communities.

House Bill 679 would ban abortions performed with the use of telemedicine, which would cut off access to safe, legal abortion for patients who already have difficulty accessing a provider. With the number of abortion restrictions rising, the communities who are considered rural and far from abortion providers have increased, while the number of abortion providers has decreased, leading to longer wait times and the need for additional appointment opportunities, which telemedicine is able to provide.

Telemedicine does not change Ohio law, we are bound by Ohio law, whether it is medically necessary or not, but we are able to use the telemedicine service method after the in person visits to lessen the burden of travel and wait times. This reduces the time and price burden of travel to better serve our patients while continuing to provide the highest quality and safest care available.

Again, there is a great need in Ohio for additional access for abortion care, especially after repeated attacks to strip access to legal abortion. If the fear was really about the method of telemedicine, then we would not have eight other bills restricting abortion that aim to shut down our health centers, creating a greater need for telemedicine supported abortion care. We know that the real aim of this bill is yet again to restrict a patient's right to make personal medical decisions for their body.

Medication abortion is one of the safest procedures in current medical practice. Medication abortion is easily administered through telemedicine because of how safe medication abortions are.

While restrictive abortion bans like this are introduced to restrict patient's access equally, that is not what ends up happening.

Bans like House Bill 679, disproportionately create additional barriers for communities already struggling to access the health care they need. Safe, legal abortion is already difficult to access for Ohioans, particularly for Black and Brown people, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with low incomes, and individuals living in remote areas.

The goal of House Bill 679 is not better health care for Ohioans or patient safety, its sole purpose is to push access to safe, legal abortion further out of reach and against the will of the majority of Ohioans. Studies have shown that 8 in 10 Americans agree that abortion should be safe, legal, and accessible. People should be able to access safe, quality abortion no matter who they are or where they live. Ohio legislators should not be in the business of taking away health care from its citizens, and instead focus on expanding access to reproductive health care.

Banning abortion through telemedicine 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."

This bill is yet another unconstitutional ban crafted with the intent to limit access to safe, legal 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.

With repeated measures restricting reproductive health care in Ohio, people in Ohio have less access to abortion than ever before. Telemedicine increases the access to health care for patients living in remote areas. The last thing Ohioans need is another abortion ban.

No matter where someone lives, they should be able to access 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 House Bill 679, which is now another dangerous 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

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