

Kellianne Craig
Senate Bill 23 – Six-Week Abortion Ban
Opponent Testimony
Ohio Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee
February 26, 2019

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Kellianne Craig. I am a physician assistant who has worked in gynecology, sexual and reproductive health for the last four years. I was born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio. I am strongly opposed to SB 23.

In my career I have counseled and cared for thousands of patients who are making decisions about reproductive planning. My time spent in this field has enlightened me to the fact that abortion is faced by patients of every background, age, gender, financial and socioeconomic status. I have bore witness to thousands of patients expressing how they came to this decision, the circumstances of their pregnancies and what they hope this choice will bring to them and their families. Opponents often paint abortion as a decision made flippantly out of carelessness. This could not be further from the truth. I submit my testimony today, as a representative of these thousands of voices.

Let us be clear that this bill is an attempt to severely limit women's autonomy and impose control over personal healthcare choices. It is itself a form of reproductive coercion that removes agency from women and denies the right to a safe, legal abortion. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, The American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Osteopathic Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics all agree that access to abortion care is a critical component of women's overall health.

I currently practice in the state of New York, which recently passed the Reproductive Health Act. This important bill eliminates a previous ban of abortion beyond 24 weeks. Serious pregnancy complications can arise and fetal non-viability can be discovered at any stage of pregnancy. This bill aligns NY state law with the federal protection of access to a safe, legal abortion at any stage of pregnancy. This bill protects the health of women and puts medical decision-making where it belongs: with patients and their providers.

The juxtaposition of SB 23 with New York's Reproductive Health Act is alarming. The parameters of SB 23 effectively ban abortion in the state of Ohio beyond six weeks of pregnancy. Many patients are unaware they are even pregnant at this gestational age. Many patients in this category are using contraceptive methods (which can fail), have taken steps to prevent pregnancy, and they have myriad financial, work and family responsibilities, not to mention health care appointment wait times that can cause delays in seeking abortion care.

It pains me as a healthcare provider and as a daughter of our great state to think about the consequences the new reality created by SB 23 would bring. I have found in my practice that it is often the most vulnerable of patients who present initially at a later gestational age. This is the 16-year-old girl who was afraid her parents would kick her out of her home, and so wrestled with the silent secret of her pregnancy. This is the

mother of four children, whose abusive partner coerces her reproductive choices and forces her to become pregnant as a means of control. This is the patient who had to reschedule her appointment due to the threat of losing one of her two jobs, which support her three dependents. This is the affluent banker, a victim of sexual assault, who paralyzed by her trauma maybe says very little about why or how she has come to this decision. Full disclosure or justification is not a prerequisite to safe, legal abortion. It is for this woman, that we as health care providers and we as neighbors need to place unbridled trust and agency into her hands. Trust that she is doing what is best for her, for none of us other than the individual can ever really know or understand the personal experience with which you walk into the health center.

I know that many of you believe that abortion is wrong, that your religious convictions and beliefs are against it. I was raised Catholic among the beautiful parishes in Youngstown. I credit my passion for social justice to the lessons I learned in my Catholic education. It was not until I had worked in this field that I formed a deep understanding of the importance of abortion to women's health. I respect your right to your convictions, but ask you to consider the women in your life impacted by reproductive choices. No one is untouched by abortion. I have sat across the table from women religious, pious in their faith, strong in their morals who come to the decision of abortion with clear confidence they are doing what is right for their health and the health of their families.

I wish you could be in that room, and hear the voices I have heard. I ask you and urge you to vote NO on this bill that threatens the health and autonomy of the citizens of Ohio.

Thank you so much for your time and for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Kellianne Craig, PA-C, MPAS