

REV. TERRY WILLIAMS TESTIMONY FOR OCTOBER 22, 2019
OHIO SENATE HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES, AND MEDICAID COMMITTEE HEARING ON SENATE BILL 155

Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Committee, thank you for taking time today to allow me to share testimony concerning Senate Bill 155.

My name is The Reverend Terry Williams. I am an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, and I currently serve as Lead Pastor of Orchard Hill United Church of Christ in Chillicothe and a Faith Organizer with the Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. As a Christian pastor, I am called to ministries of preaching, spiritual care, faith formation, and teaching within my local congregation.

In addition to my pastoral education, I have also earned an advanced degree in ethics, studying Christian ethics and theology. My area of practice is in social ethical theory and the application of Christian theology to public life and community relations. As a person tasked with providing ethical guidance within and beyond my local faith community, I follow with particular interest the excellent work that your committee does on behalf of the citizens of the state of Ohio.

As I was returning from a meeting of clergy in Columbus this past Friday, I heard a brief snippet from a member of this committee played over the radio. Not certain at what I had heard, I took the time once I had safely returned home to look up the quote directly, and I was sad to learn that my ears had in fact heard what I thought they had heard.

“You can't study this. You can't study this by saying 'We're going to give this group of women over here progesterone during the abortion procedure and this group over here, we are not going to give it to them. That would be highly unethical to do it.’”¹

This quote was aired and published by the Ohio Statehouse News Bureau and attributed to Senator Lehner, the primary sponsor of Senate Bill 155, who was quoted speaking in reference to the legislation.

I was dismayed at hearing this statement, because I feel it represents a significant misunderstanding of the ethical and moral possibilities surrounding medical research in general, and more specifically the medical science at issue within the legislative text of Senate Bill 155.

Double-blind clinical studies are the gold standard for scientific research throughout the world. By processes that have been well-honed over many generations, the scientific research community structures their research in precise ways which ensure replicable, repeatable, and reliable results from the important work they do. The ability of a study to not only follow generally accepted controls but also to provide dispassionate, factual reporting of the effects of various medical treatments strikes at the heart of ethical integrity in scientific research.

¹ Ingles, Jo. “Ohio Bill Would Require Docs To Talk About Controversial Reverse Abortion Procedure.” State News. Ohio Statehouse News Bureau, October 18, 2019. <https://www.statenews.org/post/ohio-bill-would-require-docs-talk-about-controversial-reverse-abortion-procedure>.

The study which has often been cited in support of Senate Bill 155 is no such study, and as members of this committee have already admitted, that study does not conform to usual practices in methodology, controls, assessment, or scrutiny. This glaring weakness in the science being used to support this legislation has led to the claim made by Senator Lehner that “You can’t study this,” seemingly in an effort to declare that we can never have any better information that we currently have on the subject.

This faulty conclusion is as dangerous as it is untrue — and beyond that, it is easily verifiable that such studies not only *can* exist, but already *do* exist.

Dr. Mitchell Creinin, a career OB-GYN and medical researcher at the University of California - Davis, in a grant-funded study utilizing double-blind controls, is as we speak performing the exact kind of study that could provide real and reliable scientific insight into the therapeutic possibilities and health risks of progesterone interactions with mifepristone.²

Dr. Creinin’s research will yield a wealth of knowledge concerning the possible effects that this as yet unstudied, untested, and unproven treatment may have on both patients and their pregnancies. His research is certainly ethical, overseen no doubt by at least one and likely multiple ethics boards and ethics committees who are tasked with ensuring the protection of ethical standards both within the profession of medicine and within research facilities such as Dr. Creinin’s university.

I raise this issue of Dr. Creinin’s research with you today not because I believe the outcome of his single study makes a great deal of difference concerning Senate Bill 155, but rather because I believe the existence of a study like his stands as a stark reminder of what happens when we fail to thoroughly research and scrutinize our policy positions before digging our heels in and fighting for what we believe is just and right and true.

Other opponents of this legislation have raised concern that, by introducing this bill, sponsors are trying to mislead patients and to discredit abortion providers.³ I do not believe it is the intent of any person — on this committee, or beyond within the legislature — to intentionally mislead the citizens of our state on issues as important as medical care and medical science.

But believe me, passing this legislation will mislead Ohioans.

If you allow this legislation to become law, you will be putting your stamp of approval — your good name — on pseudoscience that the current guidance from the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists calls “unproven and unethical.”⁴ At present, the scientific community does not support

² Gordon, Mara. “Controversial ‘Abortion Reversal’ Regimen Is Put To The Test.” National Public Radio, March 22, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/03/22/688783130/controversial-abortion-reversal-regimen-is-put-to-the-test>.

³ Deeter, Ben. “Opponents Dubious of Science, but ‘Abortion Reversal’ Bill to Surface at Statehouse.” *The Columbus Dispatch*, May 15, 2019. <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20190514/opponents-dubious-of-science-but-abortion-reversal-bill-to-surface-at-statehouse>.

⁴ ACOG, August 2017. <https://www.acog.org/-/media/Departments/Government-Relations-and-Outreach/FactsAreImportantMedicationAbortionReversal.pdf>.

the unproven procedures named in this legislation for the same reason you should not support this legislation: there is simply not enough evidence to show the treatment is safe or effective.

I believe that each of you on this committee today — and especially Senator Lehner — act not only in good faith but also with a deep desire to achieve the best possible health outcomes for the citizens of our state. I believe you each seek to rightly discern truth from fiction, and to hold the public trust honorably and with integrity as you seek to draft legislation that represents the best, most ethical response to the needs of the day.

I am here to tell you today, history cannot judge any of us kindly if we rush headlong into this legislation without allowing the scientific community to do its work properly and in good order, and history will not judge it a vice that you decided to wait until the science was clear about the implications of a new and as yet untested medical procedure.

Citizens of our state deserve thoughtful reasoned legislators who can lead us through difficult times of waiting and into sure-footed paths that lead to a brighter future. I know you each desire to provide that kind of leadership for our state, and I implore you do so with a reasonable and measured “No” note on Senate Bill 155.

Rev. Terry Williams
105 N. Courtland Drive
Chillicothe, OH 45601
Terry.Williams.2006@OWU.edu