

REV. TERRY WILLIAMS TESTIMONY FOR OCTOBER 22, 2019
OHIO SENATE HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES, AND MEDICAID COMMITTEE HEARING ON SENATE BILL 208

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 208.

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.

Senate Bill 208 represents, by my estimation, a solution in search of a problem, and in our state I believe there is neither necessity nor desire for the implementation of this proposed legislation. Our state already has a great number of laws, restrictions, codified procedures, and requirements that guide physicians in providing care to living patients. It is certainly no worry of mine that doctors in my local hospital in Chillicothe, Ohio, are going to administer life-saving medical care in fullest measure in every situation in which they are called to attend to patients.

I am deeply troubled at this committee's seemingly duplicative efforts within this legislation. If adopted, this legislation will not only crowd state law with overlapping and perhaps competing statutes in regard to penalties for doctors, but it may also unintentionally provide a pathway to criminalizing patient conduct in certain cases where care is a matter of emergency medical necessity. Introducing competing statutes within the laws of our state will confuse out the now clear legal status of behavior named in this proposed legislation, leading to delays and errors in implementation that could cost Ohioans peace of mind and hard-earned justice.

Beyond the confusion that is sure to come with the passage of this bill, I am dismayed to see the committee pouring out so much time, effort, and precious legislative energy on a bill that does absolutely nothing to change the dismal condition of infant and maternal mortality in the state of Ohio. While the committee sits here today hearing testimony on matters that are already more than sufficiently addressed by state and federal law, Ohio's infants, mothers, and expectant mothers are crying out for the legislature to do something about preventable deaths due to lack of healthcare access and affordability of care within our state.

Further, this legislation — while I am sure not by intent, but certainly in practice — stigmatizes the care provided by OB-GYNs and associated healthcare providers in situations where complications force a patient to seek life-saving medical care that may result in the loss of a pregnancy. As a pastor, I can

assure you there is no end to the individualized scenarios that are possible and that have not been in any way imagined, which could trigger unintended consequences under this legislation.

As a religious leader in our state, I implore you to not keep legislating overtop of existing protections and legal precedents. Stop trying to fix a problem that simply isn't presenting itself, and instead choose to focus this committee's time, effort, and energy on addressing the pressing issues before our state that hinder the success of future generations. Vote NO on Senate Bill 208 and get to work on legislation that actually addresses real issues facing real Ohioans today.

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