



# AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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December 5, 2018

The Honorable Sen. Dave Burke  
Chairperson, Senate Committee on Health,  
Human Services and Medicaid  
1 Capitol Square, Ground Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

**Re: OPPOSITION for HB 258, Testimony from American Atheists in opposition to legislation restricting abortion services.**

Dear Chairperson Burke and Members of the Senate Committee on Health, Human Services and Medicaid:

American Atheists, on behalf of its more than 1,200 constituents in Ohio, testifies in opposition to HB 258, a controversial bill which would limit access for millions of Ohio women to reproductive health care. This bill seeks to criminalize women and their doctors, to undermine Supreme Court precedent protecting women's rights, and to make it impossible for Ohioans to access legally protected abortion services. It seeks to impose one narrow religious viewpoint on the vast majority of Ohio women who support reproductive freedom. We urge you to vote against this unnecessary and harmful bill.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the "wall of separation" between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation's communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. As advocates for the health, safety, and well-being of all Americans, American Atheists objects to efforts to subordinate health care to the religious beliefs of others.

Polls consistently show that 7 in 10 Americans support legal access to abortion. In Ohio, the Pew Research Center reports that 48% of adults believe that abortion should be available in all or most cases.<sup>1</sup> Despite this widespread support, Ohio lawmakers continue to advance measure after measure to attack abortion providers, restrict access to health care, and impose burdens on women seeking abortions. The advocates behind this agenda clearly indicate their intention to ban all abortion, including in cases of rape and incest, and even when a woman's health is at risk. These bans are not about protecting women's health and well-being. They are about imposing their religious agenda on everyone else.

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center. (2014). Views About Abortion by State. Available at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/compare/views-about-abortion/by/state/>

HB 258 is clearly unconstitutional – it was written purposefully so in the hope that an activist Supreme Court will upend 40 years of precedent. It requires invasive, unworkable assessments of fetal heartbeat in order to create a near ban of abortion in the state. Moreover, it provides an exceedingly narrow definition of medical emergencies, which would prevent doctors from taking vital action to protect women’s health. Banning abortion and limiting access doesn’t reduce the need for abortion, it just forces women into extreme situations that could risk their health and lives, and criminalizes medical providers.

Like most Ohioans, we believe that women are capable of making decisions about when and how to have families. Women, not lawmakers, should make these critical decisions affecting their lives. These health care decisions should be made in consultation with a doctor who knows her circumstances and not by a politician with a religious agenda.

We urge you to vote against this dangerous and unconstitutional legislation. If this misguided bill is allowed to go into effect, it will have terrifying, life altering implications for women in Ohio. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists’ opposition to HB 258, please contact Alison Gill, American Atheists Legal and Policy Director at 908.276.7300 x9 or by email at [agill@atheists.org](mailto:agill@atheists.org).

Sincerely,

Jim Helton  
National Field Organizer  
American Atheists

cc: All members of the Ohio Senate Committee on Health, Human Services and Medicaid

My name is Kelly Helton. I am the equal rights advocate for the Tri-State Freethinkers. The Tri-State Freethinkers are the largest freethought group in Ohio and one of the most active in the country. We are against HB 258 the 6-week abortion ban!

HB 258 is unconstitutional and interferes with women's right to health care. This committee has the right to their own personal deeply held religious beliefs, but the committee doesn't have the right to impose those beliefs on the women of Ohio. The 6-week abortion ban imposes a particular religious belief on all women in Ohio. It is not based on science. It is not based on medicine. We need policies in Ohio that are medically and scientifically accurate. We need policies that empower women, not ones that send us back to the dark ages.

If the goal of the committee is to reduce the need for abortions in Ohio then let's have an honest conversation about how to do this without harming women. Ohio does not require sexuality education. It is legal for groups to come into Ohio schools and lie to children about sex. It is happening every day. If you really wanted to reduce the need for abortions and help women you would pass a law that requires sex education that is comprehensive and scientifically accurate that includes consent. If you truly wanted to reduce the need for abortions in Ohio, then contraceptives and birth control would be free and easily accessible. You would not defund Planned Parenthood. You would increase funding for Planned Parenthood. States like Colorado have taken these steps and they reduced their teen pregnancy rate, STD, rate and teen abortions by 30-40%. Why are we wasting our time on abortion bans and restrictions that are harmful and unconstitutional? When we could be talking about a real policy change that would accomplish what we both want, reduced teen pregnancy and reduced need for abortions.

In school, I was taught that we have a government of the people, by the people, for the people. But when I look back and see 19 abortion restrictions in 6 years it seems like Ohio has a government of the men, by the men, for the men without regard for women.

As a 14-year-old girl, I often find myself to be the voice of reason in a room full of unreasonable adults. I hope this is not the case today and you will vote no on HB 258!

Kelly Helton  
Equal Rights Advocate  
Tri-State Freethinkers