



OHIO SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

February 10, 2016

Governor John R. Kasich
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor Kasich,

We write to strongly urge you to veto HB 294, which would defund Planned Parenthood and similar organizations, as well as any hospital, government agency, school, or group that contracts with them. We, along with a majority of Ohioans, believe this legislation will devastate our public healthcare system and further weaken our most vulnerable communities. To sign this legislation would mean acting against the will of the people. Among Ohio voters, 65% oppose any action to defund Planned Parenthood. Furthermore, this vindictive legislation punishes an organization for providing constitutionally protected healthcare.

Our caucus joins many others in expressing grave concerns about HB 294. Healthcare professionals and media outlets throughout Ohio have been outspoken about the disastrous effects of this bill. HB 294 would not only defund non-therapeutic abortion providers, it would also defund any organization that contracts or affiliates with abortion providers. This would harm hospitals, urgent care clinics, and even schools, which may seek to bring in clinicians for student education or preventative care purposes. During public testimony in the Senate, representatives from Columbus Public Health Department opposed this bill for fear of its costly effects on their work. If HB 294 becomes law, many hospitals could no longer contract with health departments on emergency preparedness, infant mortality, or disease management programs.

Beyond the negative impacts for hospitals and other healthcare providers, this bill could irreparably damage women's and reproductive health, as Planned Parenthood is all too often the only healthcare option for many of our residents. The specific programs targeted by this bill are designed to fill existing gaps in our healthcare system. Over half of the 28 Planned Parenthood facilities in Ohio are in rural or medically underserved areas. Residents in these areas often do not have the luxury of simply finding another provider. Furthermore, only three of Ohio's Planned Parenthood facilities offer any abortion services. We would therefore be defunding multiple clinics in underserved areas that exclusively provide preventative care, STD/STI testing, and family planning programs.

Throughout the defunding debate, some have argued that there are plenty of alternative healthcare options for those Ohioans who currently receive services at Planned Parenthood.

This simply is not true.

According to press reports, the list of healthcare alternatives provided by bill supporters in the Ohio Senate "include[s] dentist offices, school nurses and a food bank as options for Ohio women."

The list of alternatives discussed in the Statehouse also included crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs), which are not healthcare clinics, nor are they equipped to be. CPCs do not have the ability or authority to provide reproductive healthcare, cancer screenings, HIV testing, STI/STD prevention, or even sex education. In addition, these centers are known nationwide for providing inaccurate and often misleading medical information. They are not a credible alternative to the wide variety of vital healthcare services offered by Planned Parenthood. It would be unwise and irresponsible to defund an organization so integral to the health of thousands of Ohioans.

In recent months, we have witnessed accusations from across the country aimed at Planned Parenthood's validity and integrity. The widespread push to defund began with a series of undercover videos, claiming to show the illegal sale of fetal tissue. These videos have now, in every way possible, been thoroughly debunked for being purposefully misleading and potentially criminal. Eleven states have cleared Planned Parenthood of all wrongdoing. Eight other states refused to investigate at all, due to the blatantly biased sources from which the accusations arose. Here in Ohio, Planned Parenthood has been investigated by both the Attorney General and the State Auditor, and their investigations confirmed that Planned Parenthood had committed absolutely no wrongdoing.

The evidence is overwhelming. Ohio residents need Planned Parenthood. It provides invaluable screenings for STIs (155,000 per year), HIV (18,000 per year), and cancer (14,000 per year). One in five women has been to Planned Parenthood in her lifetime, and over 80,000 Ohioans utilize its facilities every year.

Our limited healthcare dollars should continue to go where they are proven to provide the most good, not redirected out of spite for a particular organization. The undersigned members of the Senate Democratic Caucus ask that you veto HB 294 and work with us to craft laws that help rather than harm Ohio families.

Sincerely,



Senator Joe Schiavoni
Minority Leader
Ohio Senate, District 33



Senator Edna Brown
Minority Whip
Ohio Senate, District 11



Senator Lou Gentile
Assistant Minority Whip
Ohio Senate, District 30



Senator Capri S. Cafaro
Ohio Senate, District 32



Senator Tom Sawyer
Ohio Senate, District 28



Senator Michael J. Skindell
Ohio Senate, District 23



Senator Cecil Thomas
Ohio Senate, District 9



Senator Sandra R. Williams
Ohio Senate, District 21



Senator Kenny Yuko
Ohio Senate, District 25