

October 13, 2015

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Michigan House of Representatives Criminal Justice Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony in opposition to HB 4833 and HB 4834.

The Michigan Section of the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) represents more than 950 physicians and partners in women's health in our state. We are alarmed at this attempt to prohibit physicians from providing safe, evidence-based health care to women in the State of Michigan.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Pregnancy complications" ranked as the sixth leading cause of death in 2013 for women between the ages of 20 and 34, which is a rate comparable to that of death from stroke in women aged 35 to 64. These bills create a dangerous environment for patients by preventing doctors from having every option available when providing care; in some cases, this restriction would jeopardize a woman's health and her future fertility. Furthermore, HB 4833 and 4834 would impose felony criminal penalties on Michigan physicians who follow best practices for providing abortion in the second trimester. This would place physicians in the unconscionable position of having to deny a woman the evidence-based, compassionate care that results in the fewest complications. It is extremely dangerous for legislators to presume that they are better equipped than experienced physicians to judge what treatment approach is appropriate for a patient and under what circumstances.

ACOG's Statement of Policy on Legislative Interference includes the assertion that:

"Laws should not interfere with the ability of physicians to determine appropriate treatment options...The College and ACOG strongly oppose any governmental interference that threatens communications between patients and their physicians or causes a physician to compromise his or her medical judgment about what information or treatment is in the best interest of the patient." (emphasis added)

The rhetoric surrounding these bills is inflammatory and non-medical, as reflected by the choice to review these bills in the Criminal Justice Committee, instead of the more germane Health Policy Committee. The practice of medicine is based upon research and carefully developed standards of care. Science, not political beliefs, should be the foundation of medical decision-making. If this Legislature proscribes certain treatments and procedures for non-medical reasons, the doctor-patient relationship will have been irreparably compromised. I believe we all deserve to enter our doctor's office with the assurance that the options for care we receive will be informed by scientific research and experience, and not by a political mandate from the State House. Yet, HB 4833 and 4834 would deny this fundamental right to women, simply because their legislators subscribe to an anti-abortion-rights ideology. Now that would be a crime worthy of this committee's attention.

I recognize that this issue is both politically and emotionally charged, but that fact does not justify the attempted intrusion into the doctor-patient relationship. This Committee must consider the effects of this legislation on the provision of medicine in general and upon Michigan women's access to safe, compassionate healthcare in particular.

I urge the Criminal Justice Committee to reject HB 4833 and HB 4834. They are unwise and unsafe political intrusions into the practice of medicine in Michigan. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue.

Matthew T. Allswede, MD, FACOG
Vice-Chair, Michigan Section