



**Testimony on House Bill 63, Abortion—Pregnant Minor
Before the House Health and Aging Committee
The Hon. Lynn Wachtmann, Chair
By Karen Rainey, AAUW/Ohio Public Policy Advocate
March 2, 2011**

Chairman Wachtmann and members of the committee:

My name is Karen Rainey, and I am speaking for AAUW/Ohio (the American Association of University Women), representing more than 1,500 members in 50 branches throughout Ohio. AAUW members have made the protection of reproductive rights a policy principle since 1977.

It's a sad fact that half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended. It's sadder still to note that 82% of teen pregnancies in this country are unplanned. Teen pregnancy is a major social and public health problem, and House Bill 63 does nothing to address this problem. Studies have shown that teen pregnancies are tied to poverty, reduced academic achievement, child abuse and neglect. Because most teen parents are unmarried, their children grow up at risk for additional developmental and emotional problems.

House Bill 63 would infringe on a woman's constitutional right to reproductive choice, regardless of her age. The bill speaks to the minor's "understanding of the possible physical and emotional complications of abortion and how the minor would respond if the minor experienced those complications after the abortion." While it's important to recognize that the decision to have an abortion is significant in the life of a teen, it pales in comparison with the physical and emotional consequences of becoming a parent. Nowhere does House Bill 63 ask how the teen would approach parenthood, and yet parenthood is far more demanding physically, emotionally, and financially. According to the Guttmacher Institute, the reasons teens most frequently give for having an abortion are concern about how having a baby would change their lives, inability to afford a baby now and feeling insufficiently mature to raise a child.

This bill would require "clear and convincing evidence" that a minor is sufficiently mature and well enough informed to decide intelligently whether to have an abortion. What would constitute "clear and convincing evidence" is not defined. Nor does the bill require "clear and convincing evidence" that the minor is sufficiently mature to give birth and take on the responsibilities of raising an infant. One could make the case that it is a sign of maturity to recognize that you are not sufficiently mature to raise a child.

What would be the legal standard for “clear and convincing evidence”? It would appear that such a standard is subjective and at the judge’s discretion, rather than a legal standard that could be upheld in court.

It is our position that House Bill 63 throws up an unnecessary road block for teens who, for various reasons, cannot communicate effectively with their parents, and must seek a judicial ruling. AAUW believes that minors should have unrestricted, confidential access to all health care services, including abortion. We respectfully ask that you drop House Bill 63 from your agenda.

Thank you for your time.

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research. AAUW, founded in 1881, is open to all graduates who hold an associate or higher degree from a regionally accredited college or university. In principle and practice, AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership.