



## Michigan National Organization for Women

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June 18, 2013

Honorable Rick Jones, Chair  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
Farnum Building  
Lansing, Michigan

Dear Senator Jones and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

**Re: SB 254, a bill which would further restrict minors' access to abortion**

The Michigan National Organization for Women **opposes** SB 254. It is our view that our courts already have good procedures to prevent judge shopping. We conclude that you are considering SB 254 not to end abuse of the judicial system or to protect pregnant minors, but for the purpose of erecting barriers to access to abortion services for pregnant teens. This bill has the effect of putting the status of the fetus above that of the pregnant teen.

Most minors involve a parent or guardian in decisions concerning whether or not to have an abortion or continue a pregnancy to term, but for those who fear parental or guardian involvement, access to legal and safe abortion should not be restricted by a draconian judicial process such as is required in SB 254.

While parental involvement in minors' health care decisions is desirable, many pregnant girls will not seek out legal and safe reproductive health care if they are forced to involve a parent or a guardian, or go through invasive judicial bypass procedures. Restrictive judicial by-pass laws such as described in SB 254 threaten the health and safety of young women in numerous ways:

- **Delay:** Forced parental involvement laws with complicated judicial by-pass procedures can delay teens' access to abortion, which can result in teens obtaining a second, rather than first, trimester abortion. Although abortion is a very safe medical procedure, the risks and costs of the procedure increase significantly with gestational age of the fetus.
- **Physical and emotional abuse:** Some teens do not voluntarily involve their parents in an abortion decision because they fear abuse. Some of those teens have already experienced abuse and those teens who strongly oppose informing their parents tend to accurately predict their parents' reactions. In some cases, parental consent laws and invasive judicial bypass barriers have the effect of protecting child predators from discovery.
- **Forced motherhood:** Some teens fear that if their parents are told of their daughter's desire for an abortion they will take actions or coerce their daughter to prevent the procedure and force their daughters to carry the pregnancy to term.
- **Unsafe or illegal abortions:** In order to avoid the requirements of forced parental involvement laws, some young women will attempt to self-abort, seek dangerous illegal procedures, or harm themselves.

Testimony from Michigan NOW

- **Interference with access to confidential medical care:** Forced parental involvement laws lead some teens to believe that they cannot receive any confidential reproductive health care, thereby decreasing the likelihood that they seek care for contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.

Because of these harms, major professional organizations concerned with adolescent health, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Public Health Association, and the American Medical Women's Association, oppose parental involvement laws.

It will be no surprise to you to learn that some judges are so strongly anti-abortion that they would never agree to allow judicial by-pass for a pregnant teen who met all the criteria laid out in SB 254. This bill has the effect of locking pregnant teens in those counties out of the judicial by-pass process if she happens to be in a county with no neutral judges willing to consider the facts of her case in a non-biased fashion.

Forcing pregnant teens to go through a maze of challenging questions described in SB 254 about their living conditions, who the father is, birth control methods, grades in school, career plans, etc. will likely discourage pregnant teens from seeking a judicial by-pass.

If you want to reduce the incidence of pregnant minors and abortion, you would be wise to consider the bills providing for comprehensive sex education and give them access to free contraception at school. We urge you to spend your valuable legislative time and effort on unintended pregnancy prevention rather than dangerous anti-abortion measures like SB 254.

The Michigan National Organization for Women is a national multi-issue women's rights advocacy organization with chapters throughout Michigan and the United States.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Mary Pollock  
Legislative Vice-President