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Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan

TO: Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee
FROM: Amanda West, Director of Government Relations, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan
DATE: May 3, 2016
SUBJECT: House Bills 4787 and 4830– Criminal penalties for coercive abortion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition of House Bills 4787 and 4830. Of course, we agree that a woman should not be coerced into an abortion. Unfortunately, these bills do nothing to address the causes of coercion and relationship violence, but instead, only pander to extreme causes in the name of "protecting women."

There are already laws on the books that protect women from the coercion and discrimination these bills aim to address. Michigan's existing informed consent law already mandates that a woman's consent to an abortion must be "given freely and without coercion."

I hope that we can all agree that a woman should not be coerced into ANY decision concerning her pregnancy or reproductive health. Coercive abortion is a very small piece of the puzzle of the much larger problem of violence against women and the impact it has on their health. Focusing solely on coercive abortion, like HBs 4787 and 4830, doesn't address the very broad problem of domestic and sexual violence, which is the root cause of coercion.

Reproductive coercion, more broadly, is male behavior of domestic abuse that controls contraception and pregnancy choices of female partners. This includes many forms of abuse including forcing a partner to become pregnant, to carry a pregnancy, to discontinue a pregnancy, or sabotaging a partner's form of contraception, like poking holes in condoms or flushing birth control pills.

If the Michigan Legislature genuinely wants to meaningfully help victims of abuse they should focus on policies that increase education about domestic violence, consent and coercion as part of a comprehensive sexual education curriculum.

And ultimately, if it is the goal of the Michigan Legislature to reduce coercion and the number of abortions in Michigan, preventing unintended pregnancies should be a top priority. We should be working together to create policies that ensure women and families have access to contraceptives and comprehensive education about family planning.