

Testimony of

Jennifer Box

House Committee on Oversight and Reform

“Examining State Efforts to Undermine Access to Reproductive Health Care”

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Good afternoon, Acting Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Jordan, and members of this committee. My name is Jennifer Box. I am a mother of three living — my three-month old Astrid is behind me with my husband, Jake — I am a small business owner, a wife, and a Missourian.

I am here today to tell you the story of our daughter, Libby. I am also here to share with you, as someone who was in need of an abortion, how difficult my home state of Missouri makes it for pregnant people to access abortion. Libby’s story is heartbreakingly linked with the political landscape in Missouri — something I never imagined I would have to navigate when learning the most devastating news of our life.

It was almost in the same breath that I learned my pregnancy had a fatal fetal anomaly that I learned my home state of Missouri would insert itself in the middle of my grief.

I searched for answers everywhere and yet we found no solace in them. Our daughter, if not stillborn, would be born into a life of immediate and repeated invasive medical intervention. She would essentially be born onto life support. With broken hearts we knew that the greatest act of love that we could undertake, as her parents, would be to suffer ourselves instead: to end the pregnancy, grant Libby peace and spare her tiny, broken body a short life, full of pain.

We had made our decision and were still grappling with the reality of it, but there was little time to spare. Missourians, like me, who seek abortion, are confronted with a litany of onerous restrictions — including mandatory waiting periods, private and public insurance bans, informed-consent laws and more. This meant I moved at the direction of the government. For example:

- My doctor’s Catholic hospital, where I had delivered my two older boys, refused to care for me.

- We had to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket because of the state's insurance bans against abortion coverage.
- And perhaps the most surprising, our procedure was rushed due to the state's consent and mandatory delay laws — in order for me to access care from the same physician I consented with, as required by the state's nonsensical and arbitrary same-physician law, I had to do have the procedure almost exactly three days later or my physician would not be available again until after my pregnancy was too far along to terminate in Missouri.

Despite how difficult it was to access the medical care I needed, my actual abortion procedure was the most compassionate care I have ever received from a physician. Jake and I left that day knowing we had made the most loving and merciful choice for our child.

I thought after the procedure was over my family could begin to heal privately. I never imagined watching the State of the Union and hearing the President call women like me — women who have had abortions later in pregnancy — murderers. I never fathomed my governor would weaponize the health department in an attempt to end safe, legal abortion in Missouri. I did not anticipate my state legislature enacting an 8-week abortion ban — a ban that would have made it impossible for me to make the best decision for our family.

And let me be clear: my story does not give anyone the right to make judgments about good reasons and bad reasons for choosing an abortion. A fetal anomaly was my reason. But nobody should have to explain themselves or compare their stories to justify a deeply personal decision.

I tell my story knowing that I am a woman of privilege with means and resources to access the care I needed despite a complicated landscape of laws aimed at delaying care or blocking it altogether. Every day, women and people of color who face racist and discriminatory policies carry the heaviest burdens when navigating abortion access. Politicians like Governor Parson are hellbent on finishing off what little remains of reproductive health care in my state.

Members of Congress: I urge you to remember who you represent. I am the one in four women who will have had an abortion in her lifetime. You have the power to change a broken system working against us, and I ask that you act in our best interests.

We may not ever agree on what we would do if faced with this situation. And I'm not asking for you to condone my choice. I am simply begging lawmakers like you, who have the power to create change, to allow families to make that choice for themselves. To not force us to run from our home state just to seek basic health care. To believe that women (and men) in these situations seek all the answers they can.

I speak for Libby. It's an honor to share her name with this committee and the country today — Libby Rose Box. I am wearing rose-scented perfume today (and every day). I wear her name in a charm around my neck (just as I do with my living children). She is my daughter — she will

always be my daughter. I made decisions from day one as her mother. And I made the most important decision of Libby's life when her father and I decided to terminate the pregnancy. It was a sacred, painful, personal decision. That is our story, unique to our family, and one that **never** should've included any politicians.

Thank you for your time.