

## **Dr. Bhavik Kumar Testimony**

### **House Committee on Oversight and Reform**

Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today.

My name is Dr. Bhavik Kumar and I use he/him pronouns. I grew up in Corsicana, Texas, where my family moved when I was 10. I know what it's like to be undocumented, a person of color, gay, and governed by white supremacist laws that burden our families and communities. I decided to become a doctor because I believe that everyone deserves quality health care.

As I've provided abortion care in Texas for over seven years, I have witnessed the steady erosion of our rights and freedoms at the hands of anti-abortion politicians.

On September 1, 2021, S.B. 8 banned abortion in Texas at about six weeks, before many people even know they're pregnant. Less than a year later, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, allowing states like Texas to completely outlaw abortion. At this moment, America is effectively two countries — one where people can control their own bodies, and another where politicians have decided for them.

I've met, sat with, and cared for thousands of people who know it's not the right time for them to be pregnant. Unlike the people who pass abortion bans or uphold them in court, I actually have to face those who are harmed. I have to look my patients in the eye, listen to them beg for help, and tell them I'm not legally allowed to take care of them.

These are real people, with real lives and real stories. It is an honor and privilege to hear them. As lawmakers, it's your obligation to reckon with the devastating consequences of abortion bans for my patients and your constituents. It's your duty to hear their stories, too.

Before *Roe* was overturned, when we were still providing abortion care under S.B. 8, I saw a patient who was afraid her abusive partner would find out she was pregnant. She was sure she'd made it in time to get an abortion. She hadn't. She barely got to the clinic that day without her partner finding out – going out of state was unthinkable. She sobbed so loudly people could hear her in the waiting room. Her fate was sealed: She was sentenced by the state to carry that pregnancy to term, tethered to her abusive partner to likely endure more abuse.

These stories are endless. Rape, incest, young girls still learning about their bodies, mothers juggling multiple jobs and kids, college students with their whole lives ahead of them, trans folks who thought they couldn't get pregnant, people with wanted pregnancies where something went gravely wrong, people extremely sick from pregnancy who came in clutching IV poles — and on and on and on.

Over and over again, we are forced to violate our conscience and our training to turn away patients who need us. There is nothing more inhumane, cruel, or unethical than having to deny people the essential health care they seek in their time of need.

Now, as providers in Texas, our scope of practice is limited by the law. Texas now has **THREE** overlapping abortion bans that carry severe punishments for providers like me, including life in prison, unless it's a medical emergency — something the law fails to adequately define, because it was written by politicians, not doctors.

Doctors have to wait to intervene. People have already been denied the care they need, even for early pregnancy loss, commonly known as miscarriage, because they weren't sick enough yet – not bleeding enough yet, not miscarrying enough yet.

All this in a state with extremely high maternal mortality rates, especially for Black women, who are already three times more likely to die during childbirth. Abortion bans are inherently racist, inherently classist, and fundamentally part of the white supremacy agenda.

We don't have to imagine a world where people face the deadly consequences of being denied essential medical care. It's here, and we should be ashamed.

But it doesn't have to be this way. You all are in a position to act. Please — be creative, be bold, and do something. Act like people's lives depend on you, because they do.

I will never stop fighting for my patients, for their right to control their own bodies without political interference, and for my ability to provide them with the best medical care I can. I will show up for them with the dignity and respect that they deserve and that their government has denied them.

I welcome your questions. Thank you.