Kelsey Leigh Testimony
Thursday, September 29, 2022
House Committee on Oversight and Reform

Testimony

Thank you Chairwoman Maloney and members of the committee, for inviting me to speak to you today.

My name is Kelsey Leigh, and I came here from Pittsburgh to tell you about the abortion I had, 22 weeks into a very wanted pregnancy.

I had baby names on a short list. I had a Pinterest board full of ideas on how my two children – my 3-year-old and future baby – could share a room in our cozy, century-old house. At every appointment, it seemed my pregnancy was healthy and progressing.

But when I saw him on ultrasound for the first time at 20 weeks, 6 days, what I saw was not compatible with life as I define it – healthy, quality, free of suffering.

He wasn't moving. His limbs and neck were deformed. His umbilical cord had a structural anomaly. If my pregnancy continued, he likely wouldn't have the ability to swallow. He may not have been able to breathe and his bones would break during delivery, no matter the method.

So I did what I knew was right for my son, my family, and myself; I chose to end the pregnancy. I could not carry my son for four more months to give birth to him knowing that his life would only be filled with pain and suffering.

Pennsylvania's law allows abortions until 23 weeks, 6 days into the pregnancy. I was able to access comprehensive, compassionate abortion care within the legal window, at a hospital just 10 minutes from my home.

Just six weeks later, I stood before a bank of cameras and pled with the Pennsylvania legislature not to pass a bill that would ban abortion at 20 weeks of pregnancy. A bill that would have banned my abortion, and stripped me to my privacy in my most vulnerable moment.

We stopped that legislation in its tracks. A year later, when the same bill came up again, I went from office to office in Harrisburg, asking lawmakers to support people like me. And enough lawmakers listened, and understood the gravity of their responsibility, that we stopped that bill from becoming a law.

Pennsylvania's abortion laws are far from perfect - the state puts patients in a 24 hour time-out, after trying to shame them out of getting an abortion with biased information. Among the demeaning questions I was subjected to, was an offer to mail me a pamphlet detailing the week-by-week development of my fetus. You can understand why that was particularly difficult to hear.

But, because lawmakers listened to their constituents, in this new reality the Supreme Court created, Pennsylvania is a beacon for patients in other states. I now work at Allegheny Reproductive Health Center, where we are proud to provide abortion care. I schedule appointments, and find patients the resources they need to travel to Pittsburgh and pay for their care. Two-thirds of the calls I field in a given day are from patients who live in other states — because the abortion bans going into effect across the country cannot and will not stop anyone from needing an abortion.

No one calling to get help owes me a justification for why they need an abortion. No one has to convince me or anyone else at our clinic of their worthiness. They are each a human being, and they each have the right to control their own body. Never, not once in my years of advocating for abortion access, have I talked to someone who deserved their abortion care less than I did.

The people you each represent do not want abortion to be illegal. Your constituents are mothers like me, are young people with dreams and plans, are citizens who should be allowed to make their own decisions about their health, their bodies, and their futures.

So in this moment where you as lawmakers have been given the green light to take away our power over our most personal decisions, I want to close by asking you this question: Who are you going to be?

Will you sit in judgment of people who are pregnant without knowing them or their circumstances?

Or will you listen to me, to us, and be the compassion that our country so desperately needs right now?

Thank you.