

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Roe Reversal: The Impacts of Taking Away the Constitutional Right to an Abortion”

July 19, 2022

The Supreme Court’s extreme decision last month to overturn the constitutional right to an abortion is causing chaos and confusion throughout the nation. Today, this Subcommittee will examine the devastating impacts the Court’s decision will have on women and on health care in the United States.

The Court’s ideological decision reversed nearly 50 years of precedent. It was the first time in our nation’s history that a fundamental individual right guaranteed by the Constitution had been stripped away by an extreme and partisan Court. It is the culmination of decades of unrelenting efforts by Republicans to control women’s lives and bodies. The consequences of this unprecedented decision have been swift and severe.

Already, abortion bans are in effect in at least eight states, and over a dozen more are expected to either ban or severely limit abortion in a matter of weeks. As a result, women are either being forced to travel long distances to states where abortion remains lawful or are being forced to continue their pregnancies.

Republican state politicians and antiabortion extremists are also considering other actions that would penalize women, health care providers, and anyone who wants to assist a woman obtain a legal abortion. These tactics are already having chilling effects. Women are being denied care and doctors are being put in the horrible position of hesitating to provide life-saving health services out of legal confusion or fear of criminalization.

And Republicans have made it clear: they are plotting to advance a nationwide ban to criminalize abortion.

These Republican efforts to restrict abortion and to control a woman’s life and her future are turning back the clock on the health, well-being, and equality of women nationwide. Studies show that women denied abortion face worse financial, health, and family outcomes. There is an increased likelihood of staying in contact with a violent partner, greater risk of serious health problems, and heightened risk of maternal death.

In addition, those most impacted by abortion bans already face discriminatory barriers to health care, including women of color, low-income women, young women, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

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Since the Court's decision, the Biden Administration has taken steps to protect access to abortion. The Administration has reiterated that federal regulation permits access to medication abortion, clarified requirements under the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act, and issued guidance to make it clear to pharmacies they cannot discriminate against patients who seek to fill prescriptions.

And while Republicans continue their efforts to punish and control women, House Democrats continue our fight to protect women's right to reproductive freedom. Last week, the House passed the "Women's Health Protection Act," which restores the right to an abortion nationwide ensuring all Americans – regardless of where they live – can make their own decisions about their lives and futures. We also passed the "Ensuring Women's Right to Reproductive Freedom Act," which reaffirms the constitutional right to travel across state lines to obtain a lawful abortion. It also protects health care providers who provide lawful abortions to out-of-state residents. And it protects anyone who may assist a woman in crossing state lines to obtain a lawful abortion, such as a friend, partner, or volunteer. It's now time for the Senate to act on both these bills.

There is simply too much at stake. Consider my constituent, Andrea, who is a fourth-year student at Rutgers University. Andrea learned she was pregnant when she was 19 years old, in her sophomore year of college, while in a toxic and abusive relationship. Andrea realized she wasn't in a position to raise a child, particularly with her then-partner, and that she'd be changing the trajectory of her future.

As she said at a rally before the Supreme Court's decision, and I'm quoting now, "I am thankful every day that I made the choices that I did, and I was able to make those choices."

It's Andrea's right and every woman's right to make her own decision about her health, her future, and her family without interference from Republican politicians.

Democrats will continue our fight to protect access to reproductive health care and restore the right to an abortion as the law of the land. In the meantime, we must understand what is happening on the ground in the wake of this dangerous decision. For that reason, I am pleased the witnesses are here today and I look forward to their testimony.