



## **House of Representatives**

Energy & Commerce Committee

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

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

July 19, 2022

### **Testimony by Renee Bracey Sherman, Executive Director, We Testify**

Good morning members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. It is my distinct honor to speak to you this morning and serve my country in this way. My name is Renee Bracey Sherman, I use she/her pronouns, and I am the founder and executive director of We Testify, an organization dedicated to the leadership and representation of people who have abortions. Like many of your constituents and loved ones, I had an abortion when I was 19 years old. It was one of the best decisions of my life because it freed me from a toxic relationship and it was one of the first decisions where I felt fully in control of my body and my future. Like many of your constituents and loved ones, I was working a retail job, earning quarters and dimes above the minimum wage, and couldn't afford gas in my car to get to work or the birth control copay which was \$120 at the time. But, no matter what, I didn't want to be pregnant and that is enough of a reason for me to have an abortion.

I've told this story hundreds of times leading up to the overturning of Roe, hoping that the right number of politicians will see my humanity and trust me to know what's best for my life, even if they would choose a different path for their own pregnancies. I've been to several of these hearings before, often sitting behind the We Testify storytellers as they share their stories, hoping that you'll see us as fully capable human beings who know what's best for our lives and our families. The We Testify storytellers are courageous people who open up their hearts and souls to share their abortion stories so that you understand what the barriers you create look like in real people's lives. And yet, once again, here I am today, begging for you to restore access to abortion care across the nation for all of us. I am hoping that you might hear our stories and enact legislation that won't turn people who need and provide abortions into criminals and put bounties on the acts of service from those who love us.

What's happened in this nation is a travesty. The Supreme Court says they returned abortion to state representatives, where it belongs, but I believe that is inaccurate. Abortion belongs in the hands of people who have them, plain and simple. Not in the hands of politicians who had to gerrymander their districts beyond recognition and suppress our votes to remain in power.

Abortion isn't new—we've been having abortions for over 4,000 years. What's new is the medically inaccurate and stigmatizing restrictions designed to demonize us and make our lives harder than they already are. Some people who want abortions aren't able to get them because

they can't afford the multi-state journey, time off of work, or to cross a border checkpoint due to their immigration status. People who are incarcerated or being held in ICE's cages have few options for any pregnancy health care, let alone an abortion. It is tragic, not only because they have to remain pregnant when they don't want to be while caring for the children they already have, but also because they're doing it in a nation where the very politicians who forced them to do so can't be bothered to enact nationwide paid parental or sick leave, create a national health system, or expand Medicaid. They won't treat trans children with respect, close the immigration jails caging families, protect children from being murdered in schools, or do anything about the Black and Brown people being killed by police every day. These aren't separate issues: they're the very things we weigh as we consider whether we'd like to bring another life into this nation. This is what reproductive justice is all about: the ability for all of us—especially communities of color—to be able to decide if, when, and how to grow our families, and be able to do so free from state-sanctioned violence and coercion.

Despite the abortion bans, many people are still getting abortions—they just have to travel out of their hometowns and communities for care. I know because I am one of the thousands of volunteers with local abortion funds who receive them into our cars, homes, and communities so they can see an abortion provider who is still able to care for them. This is now community care that I could be criminalized for, not because I did anything wrong, but because anti-abortion legislators think it's good policy to criminalize people for showing up for their fellow Americans. The people I serve are frustrated and determined. They too are angry about kitchen table issues like the price of gas right now because that also means their drive to the nearest clinic is that much more expensive while trying to figure out how to feed and house the children they already have.

I feel so lucky that my Abortion Care Network-certified independent abortion clinic was only 10 minutes from my home and the Orthodox Jewish nurse held my hand during the procedure because her faith called her to. But that almost wasn't my abortion story. Shortly before my abortion appointment, I didn't know if I could hold on. I didn't think I could be pregnant for one more moment. I hoped it would all go away. When it didn't, every day I considered throwing myself down the stairs as I had seen in movies and history books. One night, I drank until I couldn't any longer, believing that it would cause a miscarriage. It didn't work.

Thankfully, I went to my appointment and received my abortion—that was when it was legal in every state. Now it is not, and I know there are people out there who are going to try the methods I did. I want them to know that there are safe ways for them to self-manage their abortions, but unfortunately, because of the Supreme Court's ruling and the callousness of state legislators, that could be a crime.

I want to be clear: no one should be prosecuted for the outcome of their pregnancies, whether it is a miscarriage, stillbirth, or an abortion. Neither should the providers who care for us. Over the past decade, thousands of people have already been arrested and sentenced because of how their pregnancies ended. They are disproportionately low-income, and Black, Indigenous,



Latinx, and Asian people. They are already over-policed communities who don't have the same access to prenatal care, and now don't have access to the abortion care they need.

One in four of us will have an abortion in our lives. Everyone loves someone who has abortions. Ask yourself, who do you love that you'd be willing to lock up simply because they had an abortion?

I have been sharing my abortion story to liberate abortion for over a decade. For a long time, I thought I and my cousin Nora were the only ones who'd had abortions in our family. But as I shared my story it turned out many of my cousins, aunts, and extended family members had abortions too. They were among the 6,641 people who've had abortions and called on the Supreme Court to keep abortion legal. Abortion is just one of the many decisions that makes our families what they are. I owe my life and my ability to sit here today to abortion access; not only my own but because a Black woman was able to have an abortion not too long after *Roe v. Wade* made it legal in Illinois. She was in a relationship that wasn't serving her and the abortion allowed her to leave and meet a man in nursing school. They married and had a child. That child was me. As my mother told me, "Renee, I chose you." That's exactly what abortion is about: the ability for all of us to choose if, when, and how to create our families, on our own terms.

I am proud to testify here today to not only represent my mother's choices and my own but all of us who've had abortions and share our stories in hopes that one day you will see our humanity and trust us to make the best decisions for ourselves.

On behalf of the over one hundred We Testify abortion storytellers, several of whom have testified before you already, we ask you to finally trust us to know what's best for our families and futures. Rescind all bans on abortion so that we, and those you love, are able to have access to abortions at any time and for any reason, anywhere in this nation.

Thank you for listening.

Renee Bracey Sherman  
Executive Director, We Testify

