

Dear Chairman Pallone, Chairwoman Eshoo, Ranking Member Burgess, and Members of the Subcommittee:

As an abortion provider committed to providing the highest quality medical and emotional care, with dignity and compassion, we are writing to express our full support for H.R. 2975, the Women's Health Protection Act. This federal legislation would protect access to abortion care from state-level bans and medically unnecessary restrictions that are currently reducing or eliminating access to care across the country.

Access to comprehensive reproductive health care is essential to people's health, well-being, and ability to participate equally in their communities. The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed—most recently in 2016—that abortion is a fundamental right and that undue burdens on access violate the Constitution. Yet, anti-abortion lawmakers continue to push increasingly extreme and harmful laws that single out abortion care for restrictions that do not apply to similar health care. These laws delay or, in some cases, entirely block access to abortion care and are designed to shame people seeking abortion services. Everyone deserves the ability to make personal health decisions and seek abortion free from political interference and judgement.

The Women's Health Protection Act would safeguard the right to access abortion free from medically unnecessary restrictions and bans on abortion. By passing this bill, Congress would ensure that the right to abortion, first recognized in *Roe v. Wade*, is a reality for people across the United States.

Hope Clinic for Women, located in Granite City, Illinois, just ten minutes across the Mississippi River from downtown St. Louis, Missouri, has been rooted in our community for 46 years. Yet, only 37 percent of the patients we see are Illinois residents. With one remaining abortion provider in the state of Missouri, due to targeted regulations of abortion providers, along with numerous restrictions regarding access to abortion, such as a 72-hour waiting period and medically inaccurate state mandated consent, 58 percent of the patients we see are Missouri residents, on top of another five percent from other states that have similar restrictions on access to abortion.

People's rights are being decimated by the onslaught of medically unnecessary restrictions and bans on access to abortion care. These restrictions delay and block access to care, increase costs to patients, create inequities in access to health care, and are meant to shame people seeking abortion care.

In recent months and years, anti-abortion lawmakers have escalated their extreme efforts to prevent people from accessing abortion in their communities. Since 2011, anti-abortion lawmakers have pushed nearly 450 restrictive laws through state legislatures.

These laws, often presented under the guise of being health and safety regulations, do nothing to protect patient well-being. Denial of abortion care can have serious long-lasting consequences on a person's health and well-being including increasing the risk of experiencing poverty, physical health impairments, and intimate partner violence¹.

In 2019 alone, nine states passed abortion bans that prohibit abortion at different stages of pregnancy, some as early as six weeks, before many people even know they are pregnant. For

example, Alabama's total ban would criminalize providing abortion care, even in cases of rape, incest, or the health or life of the pregnant person. All of these blatantly unconstitutional bans have been blocked in court, but the bans keep coming and other laws and restrictions are in effect that are severely limiting people's access to abortion care today.

This coordinated, nationwide strategy to eliminate abortion access has made the constitutional right to access abortion dependent on where a person happens to live. Today, nearly 90 percent of American counties are without a single abortion provider, leaving millions of women to travel long distance and incur sometimes insurmountable costs when seeking care.

Abortion is one of the safest medical procedures in the United States and should not be singled out and treated differently from other healthcare, particularly through restrictions that have no medical value and do nothing to benefit the health or safety of the pregnant person.

As clinics close, the constitutional right to abortion has become more expensive with more barriers as the people who already face inequities experience adverse effects on their physical health, short-term life aspirations, and economic well-being by not being able to get a wanted abortion².

The Women's Health Protection Act would put a stop to these harmful restrictions and bans, and protect access to abortion care for all, no matter where a person happens to live. The Women's Health Protection Act establishes a statutory right for health care providers to provide, and their patients to receive, abortion care free from medically unnecessary restrictions, limitations, and bans that single out abortion and impede access to care.

Our constitutional rights and ability to access comprehensive health care should not depend on our zip codes. Now is the time for Congress to pass the Women's Health Protection Act.

We, as abortion providers, know that when people can't access basic reproductive healthcare in the place that they call home, communities as a whole suffer. Patients give birth without any other options and people who have the support and fortitude to travel hundreds or thousands of miles from their home are systematically traumatized as their state and elected officials fail them in their time of need. We provide abortion care because we believe that everyone deserves support and dignity in their lives. We know that people who have abortions are the people around us who we love, they are parents, people of faith, people we work with, people in our families. As we look towards *June Medical Services, LLC v. Gee*, Congress must recognize that the right to abortion is not enough. We call on you to pass this important piece of legislation to protect patients' health and safety, the wellbeing of their families, their communities, and the nation as a whole.

We commend this committee for holding a hearing on this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

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¹ Foster DG, Ralph LJ, Biggs MA, Gerds C, Roberts SCM, Glymour MA, “Socioeconomic outcomes of women who receive and women who are denied wanted abortions,” AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH (2018) Mar; 108(3):407-413; Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health, “Turnaway Study: Long-term study shows that restricting abortion harms women,” BIXBY CENTER FOR GLOBAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (retrieved from https://www.ansirh.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/turnaway_study_brief_web.pdf).

² NBER Working Paper No. 26662 <https://www.nber.org/papers/w26662>