



Planned Parenthood
Federation of America



Planned Parenthood Action Fund

February 12, 2020

United States House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee
on Health

Hearing Entitled “Protecting Women’s Access to Reproductive Health Care”

Planned Parenthood Federation of America (“Planned Parenthood”) and Planned Parenthood Action Fund (“the Action Fund”) submit these comments for the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health’s consideration in strong support of the Women’s Health Protection Act, H.R. 2975, in conjunction with your hearing for Wednesday, February 12, 2020.

Planned Parenthood is one of the nation’s leading providers of high-quality, affordable health care and the nation’s largest provider of sex education. With more than 600 health centers across the country, Planned Parenthood health centers provide affordable birth control, vaccinations, lifesaving cancer screenings, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, HIV screenings, and other essential care to 2.4 million patients each year. Planned Parenthood’s services and education are critical for underserved communities, specifically communities of color and communities with low-incomes, facing limited access to reliable and affordable health care.

Planned Parenthood strongly supports H.R. 2975, the “Women’s Health Protection Act,” important legislation that would protect access to abortion care from state-level bans and medically unnecessary restrictions that are contributing to reduced or eliminated access to vital health care services across the country. We further applaud Congresswoman Judy Chu (D-CA-27) and Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) for introducing this important legislation and their numerous colleagues for co-sponsorship.

Approximately one in four women in this country will have an abortion by age forty-five. People choose to have abortions for a variety of interrelated health, familial, economic, and personal reasons. A majority of women having abortions (61%) already have at least one child, while most (66%) also plan to have a child or additional children in the future.¹ Abortion is a deeply personal medical decision that should be left to a pregnant patient with the counsel of their doctor or healthcare provider, not politicians.

¹ Repeat Abortion in the United States, Rachel K. Jones, Susheela Singh, Lawrence B. Finer and Lori F. Frohworth, Occasional Report No. 29, November 2006, Accessed via Guttmacher Institute:
https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/or29.pdf

Each pregnant person who is seeking abortion should have the access they need to that constitutionally protected medical procedure. The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed—most recently in 2016 in *Whole Woman’s Health*—that access to abortion is a constitutional right and that undue burdens on a person’s ability to access care violate the United States Constitution.

In the face of the irrefutability of these facts, an ideologically-driven minority continues its efforts to deny people access to their constitutionally-protected right to access abortion and related health care services. During the 2019 state legislative sessions alone, 58 new restrictions on abortion were enacted into law. All in all, in 2019, a record 25 abortion bans were enacted in 12 states.² These laws single out abortion care for medically unnecessary restrictions that do not apply to similar health care services. They do not seek to improve access to health care but rather to delay and in some cases block access entirely, all the while shaming people who seek this care. They are especially dangerous since they disproportionately impact traditionalized marginalized communities that already face systemic barriers to health care and as a result experience inequality in health outcomes, including people of color, people with low-incomes, and members of the LGBTQ community.

There is considerable evidence that these types of restrictions have been tremendously effective at undermining access to abortion. Since 2011, the number of health centers that provide abortion has plummeted, and people in large swaths of the country have been left with nowhere to get an abortion. According to a Guttmacher analysis, between 2011 and 2017 (the latest years of abortion provider census data), the Midwest and the South experienced declines in abortion providers of 27 percent and 20 percent respectively. By 2017, 89 percent of U.S. counties lacked an abortion-providing clinic and six states - Kentucky³, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, and West Virginia - currently had only one abortion clinic.⁴

However, the public overwhelmingly supports abortion access, with nearly 8 in 10 Americans opposed to overturning *Roe v. Wade*.⁵ **Undermining access to safe, legal abortion is wildly out of touch with the majority of voters in this country.**

² State Policy Trends 2019: A Wave of Abortion Bans, But Some States Are Fighting Back, Elizabeth Nash, Lizamarie Mohammed, Olivia Cappello, Sophia Naide, December 2019, Accessed via Guttmacher Institute:

<https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2019/12/state-policy-trends-2019-wave-abortion-bans-some-states-are-fighting-back>

³ Kentucky has since, in early 2020, gained an additional abortion clinic.

https://www.themoreheadnews.com/news/elections-have-consequences-planned-parenthood-gets-licens-e-to-perform-abortions/article_a71ba7ac-4c29-11ea-8d9c-5742644f7458.html

⁴ Jones RK, Witwer E and Jerman J, Abortion Incidence and Service Availability in the United States, 2017, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2019,

<https://www.guttmacher.org/report/abortion-incidence-service-availability-us-2017>

⁵ Marist Poll, NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll of 944 National Adults, 2019, Poughkeepsie: Marist Poll. Retrieved from

http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/NPR_PBS-NewsHour_MaristPoll_USA-NOS-and-Tables-on-Abortion_1906051428_FINAL.pdf#page=3.

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

We strongly urge Congress to pass H.R. 2975 and protect access to safe and legal abortion care. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or wish to discuss the contents of these comments further. Thank you for conducting a hearing on this important matter.

Sincerely,

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