

Testimony Concerning the Women's Health Protection Act
For the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health
Submitted by Toni Van Pelt, president, National Organization for Women
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Thank you, Chair Eshoo, for the opportunity to submit our comments concerning the Women's Health Protection Act of 2019, H.R. 2975, sponsored by Rep. Judy Chu and co-sponsored by 215 members of this body. The National Organization for Women (NOW) is the largest feminist grassroots activist organization with hundreds of chapters in every state and the District of Columbia and hundreds of thousands of members and contributing supporters. We strongly support the Women's Health Protection Act, believe that its protections are urgently needed and express our sincere hope that H.R. 2975 can soon become the law of the land.

For all of our 54-year history, NOW has advocated for women's bodily autonomy and women's fundamental human right to determine whether and when to become pregnant and give birth. That right is increasingly being recognized throughout the world as nations come to realize that women's role in the economic well-being of the family and the community is key. Not only is economic well-being critically important but women's own health is seen as essential to her ability to sustain the family and be a productive member of society. Access to safe reproductive health care underpins all of this. Therefore, it is essential that restoration of full access to reproductive health care services is achieved in every state and every community by this legislation.

As we are acutely aware, hundreds of restrictive bills have been passed in virtually every state where abortion rights opponents control state legislatures and governorships. This has come about because ultra-conservative religious organizations and their allies have worked for decades, spending millions of dollars to support anti-choice legislators and lobbying to get harmful restrictive legislation adopted. Every single type of legislation is medically unnecessary, from outright bans, to 24- and 48-hour waiting periods, to scripted and biased counseling, to invasive trans-vaginal ultrasound exams, to targeted restrictions on abortion providers, and many others -- all are intended to deter women from seeking appropriate care and to close women's health clinics. These forces have decimated America's once wide network of health clinics that provided not only abortion care, but essential family planning, pap smears, breast cancer screening, STD exams and other routine reproductive health care services. These clinics served tens of millions of women and men, at low cost, and filled an essential need now unmet in every state and most communities.

We are especially supportive of the Women's Health Protection Act's provision prohibiting any restriction on access to medication abortion in the earliest weeks of pregnancy. Medication abortion was championed by this organization as early as the late 1980s and we were thrilled when it was finally made available in the U.S. in 2000. However, there are moves by the current administration to prevent access to this safe and effective medication that meets the needs of women in rural and under-served areas.

Members of the National Organization for Women have always believed that the decision to seek an abortion is a moral one and that it is a socially responsible position that women express when deciding to seek an abortion. In some instances, the health or the life of the woman is at stake when there is a pregnancy. The role of the professional health care provider, along with the needs and desires of the woman, should not be over-ridden by conservative religious and political interests -- ever.

We know that this campaign against women's access to reproductive health care has nothing to do with promoting women's health and safety, but is about controlling women and their bodies. Misogyny clearly plays a part. It is hard to believe that in the 21st century, in the wealthiest nation in the world, with all of our medical advances that these restrictions on vital health care needs have been allowed to persist.

All NOW members and supporters are hopeful that, in the very near future, the Women's Health Protection Act can be adopted in both the House and Senate and signed into law. We can't wait.

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