

Jami Contreras

Equality Act H.R. 5

April 2, 2019

Thank you for taking the time to hear my family's story. Four and half years ago my six day old daughter was denied medical services by our hand picked pediatrician. This was after we made very strategic and intentional decisions to do everything in our power to avoid this very act of discrimination from happening.

You see, about 7 years ago, my wife, Krista and I were living in my small hometown located in West Michigan. After deciding we were ready to start a family, we made the hard decision to pack up our lives and relocate 230 miles east to the Metro-Detroit area hoping to ensure our future children would grow up in an accepting community, free from discrimination. We ended up finding the perfect house located in one of the most LGBTQ friendly towns, which has a good school district, a close knit community, and above all is safe.

Not long after we purchased our home, we found out, my wife was pregnant with our first child! We were elated. Doing what any good parents would do, we started to research pediatricians. We asked for help on social media forums and obtained referrals from people we knew.

My wife and I both made sure to attend every interview with potential pediatricians, making it very clear this is a two helicopter mom family. After several interviews, the search was over. We had found a pediatrician that met all of our requirements. She was personable, energetic, listened to our concerns, was able to talk through her medical philosophy, explained things in a way we could understand, and didn't seem concerned we were two moms. We left that meeting with her telling us, to just call her office after the baby is born and set the appointment.

A few months later our amazing baby girl, Bay Windsor Contreras was born. We followed the doctor's orders and made our first appointment. We were so excited for that appointment. As new parents we were craving the reassurance that we were doing everything right and our baby was healthy and happy. When we arrived at the office, they escorted us in our room and we waited for our doctor, excited to show her off. But when a different doctor walked in the room, introduced herself and then started in with the appointment. Krista and I, confused, had to stop the doctor to ask, "I'm sorry, where's Dr. Roi?" She proceeded to tell us, Dr. Roi would not be seeing us and that she would be Bay's doctor today. When asked why, she stated Dr. Roi had "prayed on it" and decided she would not be able to take Bay on as a client.

My stomach sank, my eyes filled with water, and the lump in my throat felt like a rock. I remember staring at my new baby who was now being examined by a doctor we had never met and all I could think was, what have we done, how did we get here? We did everything within our power to avoid this very moment, we moved across state, spent endless hours of research and interviews all to avoid this very situation...yet, here we were. It's our job to protect her and there we were, only six days into the most important jobs of our lives and we had already failed.

While checking out, the receptionist asked if we wanted to make another appointment. We declined and stated we would not be back, to which she told us she understood. Showing us she knew exactly what was going on well before we even did.

It was a somber ride home from that appointment. Krista rode in the back seat with Bay as I drove home fighting back tears. Instead of leaving that appointment with reassurance, we were left with nothing but fear and more questions. My mind racing with the question that still haunts me today. "What's next?" Will we be asked to leave a restaurant, not allowed to sign her up for a soccer team, will we be denied access to our school of choice, or refused help by an EMT?

The only silver lining in our story is that she was six days old rather than six years old, so we luckily didn't have to try to find the words to explain to her what had just happened. However, she's now at an age where she's starting to asking questions and we have to explain why Mommy and Mama are sometimes on TV or have to take trips like this one. She impresses me with her ability to comprehend the concept of equality. She often responds with questions such as, "why mama, it's ok to be different" or what she said when I asked her if I should come here today, she said " you have to go mama, because you can help all families, not just ours feel safe."

When people ask us why we keep speaking up with the risk that comes with putting our family in the public eye, Krista and I know all too well, no amount of planning can avoid discrimination. We have to keep sharing our story to let people know this is happening to people like us and families like ours every day and the only sure protection has to come from our government. We need our government to send the message, that all Americans are equal. This is where you come in. We're calling on you to pass the Equality Act. Please help me show my kids that our family and all LGBTQ people have the right to feel safe in the communities in which they live.

Thank you,

Jami Contreras