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U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary Hearing:
“The Texas Abortion Ban and its Devastating Impact on Communities and Families”

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Written Testimony

Good morning distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the generous invitation to come speak to you about the state of abortion access in Florida. My name is Stephanie Loraine Piñeiro and I am the co-executive director of the abortion fund Florida Access Network, a storyteller with We Testify, a Puerto Rican poderosa, a survivor of sexual assault, a bisexual woman who has had two abortions, and a social worker with a masters degree from the University of Central Florida. As proud as I am to testify before you today, I am dismayed that I am here to explain why we must continue to defend our constitutionally protected right to abortion which is healthcare protected by decades of settled law.

On September 1, as a result of the Supreme Court's inaction, the most restrictive abortion ban in the United States, Texas' SB8, was allowed to go into effect, adding yet another barrier for people who want to have an abortion as early as six weeks. The law has cut abortions in half¹ in two months, meaning people who wanted abortions were turned away from clinics and forced to travel out of state for care or forced to continue their pregnancies against their will. On Monday, the Supreme Court Justices heard oral arguments on the impact that the law has had on Texans. If that wasn't scary enough, we're already we're seeing states like mine, Florida, working to enact a similar law to ban abortion. I am worried for our future and what it means for people who need abortions today, tomorrow, and the years to come. I know pregnant Floridians are worried too.

I don't have to imagine their pain, I know what it is like to want an abortion, only to be tripped up by medically unnecessary restrictions and financial barriers. You see, when I was a teenager, I became pregnant twice, once as a result of a sexual assault and again during a relationship when I was 17. Both times I knew I wanted an abortion but abortion stigma coupled with financial and logistical barriers made access difficult and ultimately delayed. The first time I needed an abortion was the day I realized I'd been sexually assaulted while I was in a vulnerable state. I was confronted with the reality that many people who've been sexually assaulted face, one where I blamed myself. I felt ashamed about what happened to me and I felt ashamed of needing or wanting an abortion as a result. I know now that being sexually assaulted was not my fault and that wanting or needing an abortion is nothing to be ashamed of regardless of how someone becomes pregnant.

Prior to my second abortion, when I was 16, my Catholic pediatrician refused to prescribe me birth control against my request. A year later, when my then-boyfriend tried to purchase Plan B, the pharmacist refused to sell it despite the law changing a month prior allowing over-the-counter purchasing. After I was denied Plan B, I spent the next two weeks waiting to know whether I would become pregnant and searched the internet for clues about how I could end my own pregnancy if I needed to, even if that meant I would risk my life doing so. I was afraid of violence escalating while living in an already unsteady home and I was afraid of what could happen when I told my very traditional Latino parents that I needed an abortion, again.

I've been failed by this nation's healthcare system. Like 72 million Americans, my family was enrolled in Medicaid, but because of the Hyde Amendment, my abortions were not eligible for

¹ [Abortions Fell by Half in Month After New Texas Law - The New York Times](#)

coverage under this health insurance. It took me several weeks to save up enough money to be able to afford the procedure. During my second abortion, I was a dual enrolled college and high school student working as a waitress to help my family during the recession. I only earned \$2.17 an hour as my base pay—which is *still* the federal minimum wage for tipped restaurant workers—and I had to pick up extra shifts just to earn the \$450 for my abortion.

I could not safely go to my parents for help with my abortion and because Florida has a parental involvement law, I had to skip class to go to court and ask a judge—a complete stranger—for permission to end my pregnancy through a process called “judicial bypass.” I had to present myself, in a five page essay, as mature enough not to parent a child when I didn’t want to. The whole ordeal took several weeks and delayed my abortion even more. If a law like SB8 had been in effect in Florida, I would not have been able to get my abortion in my community.

A decade after obtaining my judicial bypass, I co-authored a groundbreaking [report](#) with If/When/How Lawyering for Reproductive Justice examining court preparedness in Florida as it pertains to providing clear, consistent, accurate, and unbiased information about the judicial waiver process. Researchers telephoned all 67 Florida counties seeking information about the judicial waiver process and classifying just 11 as “prepared or knowledgeable” about the process. Another 15 counties were classified as “semi-prepared,” demonstrating “a degree of knowledge about aspects of the process, but...unable to provide information sufficient enough to assume a young person would be able to proceed with the information provided.” The remaining 37 Florida counties could offer little or no information about the process, and one court staffer attempted to dissuade the If/When/How caller from choosing abortion. The judicial waiver process is itself a barrier to abortion and adding more restrictions is simply an exercise in creating more burdens for young people who must be able to self-determine their reproductive lives without navigating a labyrinthine court system where even well-intentioned staff are under- and untrained to offer assistance.

The truth is, I didn’t realize how much of an injustice all of this was until five years after my second abortion when I began my abortion advocacy work. I was lucky to have been granted a judicial bypass and to be able to afford my abortion, but I know this is not the reality for many people around the country, and even more if laws like SB8 are enacted in other states.

In Florida, we’re at risk of seeing a six week abortion ban enacted. This ban—which is really a two week abortion ban because we often don’t know we’re pregnant until a missed period four weeks later—is an injustice. Florida’s anti-abortion lawmakers have employed diverse tactics to restrict abortion access and now have stacked the State Supreme Court with a anti-abortion majority that is ready to reinterpret the state’s constitutional right to privacy as another tactic to restrict abortion. The state’s constitutional right to privacy, which has protected Floridians from many of the abortion restrictions faced by our neighboring southern states, is hanging on by a thread. Anti-abortion legislators are committed to passing whichever abortion restrictions will stick, whether it’s six weeks or 15-weeks, all of these restrictions ban on abortion for someone.

This isn't an abstract idea. It is what I do every single day through my work at the Florida Access Network (formerly known as the Central Florida Women's Emergency Network) founded in 1996 as a national response to abortion access needs. Our mission is to build pathways for abortion access by advocating for reproductive justice, funding abortion care, and providing logistical support to people who need abortions. Florida Access Network was a volunteer organization until 2020 when I became one of our first staff members. Since my entry to Florida Access Network in 2015, we have helped 1,870 people pay for their abortions and have offered over \$200,000 in funding for our clients. Our pledges average about \$100, while the average cost of an abortion in Florida is \$600. We can help, but we cannot fill the gap making abortion unattainable for too many.

We help people with rides or gas money to get to their appointments because, according to the Guttmacher Institute, 73% of Florida counties have no abortion clinics². We help coordinate childcare because, as you know, most people who have abortions are already parenting. We help young people under 18 navigate the complicated judicial bypass process if they cannot safely express their desire to have an abortion with their guardian. And, most importantly we fund abortion because low wages, abortion restrictions like SB8, and policies like the Hyde Amendment make abortion unaffordable and unattainable without mass resources and the ability to travel outside of our communities.

The majority of people who have abortions are people of color, and a quarter of abortion patients are Latinx³, like me. Latinx people are not a monolith, but we do deeply value family and supporting one another through challenging moments. We do not support laws that would allow our loved ones to be sued for helping us get the abortion care we need. These abortion restrictions impact us hardest—they're designed that way. The abortion bans are racist because they deny Black and Brown people, and anyone who cannot afford it, the ability to decide if, when, and how to create and grow their families. Abortion bans like this stem from a white supremacist desire to control Black and Brown people, not allow us to determine our own futures.

I've helped hundreds of people access their abortions. I hear their stories, directly from them, and they know deeply what is best for them and their families especially their decision to have the abortions they need — if only their Congressional representatives would learn to trust them.

All of you in this room have the power to pass legislation to ensure that we are able to access abortion care, as promised to us by the Constitution, and by nature of healthcare being a basic human right. Together, we can make abortion care accessible, affordable, and stigma free because needing and having an abortion is nothing to be ashamed of.

As we say at We Testify, everyone loves someone who had an abortion. Thank you for listening to my story, and I hope you remember that the actions you take impact your constituents and loved ones who have abortions, and all of us across this nation.

² [State Facts About Abortion: Florida | Guttmacher Institute](#)

³ [Induced Abortion in the United States | Guttmacher Institute](#)

Thank you for listening.