



FOR REPRODUCTIVE EQUITY

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U.S. House Labor Health, & Human Services Subcommittee Hearing:

“The Impact of Women Seeking an Abortion But Are Denied Because of an Inability to
Pay”

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Written Testimony

Good morning Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, and members of the committee. Thank you for having me before you today to speak about the impact of policies that deny insurance coverage for abortion, including and especially the Hyde Amendment.

My name is Amanda Beatriz Williams, and I am a queer Tejana and daughter of an immigrant, with a decade of experience in the reproductive health, rights, and justice movement in Texas. I serve as the executive director of the Lilith Fund for Reproductive Equity, the oldest abortion fund in Texas. Abortion funds exist to help people navigate the intricate web of anti-abortion restrictions—including abortion coverage bans like the Hyde Amendment— that prevent people from obtaining safe abortion care. Lilith Fund provides direct financial assistance and emotional support to those in the central and southern regions of Texas, and is one of ten abortion funds serving our state.

I am also a proud abortion storyteller with We Testify, an organization dedicated to the leadership and representation of people who have abortions, to change the conversation to one of compassion and remind us that **everyone loves someone who had an abortion.**

However any of us feel about abortion, politicians should not be allowed to deny someone's health coverage for it just because they are struggling to get by.

Unfortunately, that's exactly what Congress has done for the last 44 years through the Hyde Amendment.

Across the country, the Hyde Amendment has had devastating impacts for people unable to make ends meet — who are more likely to be women of color — LGBTQ people, immigrants, and young people. And for too many, coverage bans like the Hyde Amendment can act as defacto bans on abortion altogether.

At Lilith Fund, we know firsthand the impact that coverage bans have on the Texans we serve. During the year 2019, [68 percent of Lilith Fund clients were people of color](#), 45 percent were uninsured, 42 percent did not have paid employment and they traveled an average of 158 miles to reach the abortion care they need.¹

The harms of the Hyde Amendment are further compounded by additional state restrictions, including state-mandated ultrasounds, medically inaccurate and biased counseling, and a mandatory 24-hour waiting period that forces Texans to needlessly delay their care. Since 2013, my state has shuttered nearly half of its abortion clinics, forcing people to travel far distances and shoulder additional expenses.

In addition to affording the abortion care, there are costs for travel to one's nearest clinic, lodging, lost wages from missed work, and child care for the nearly 60 percent of our clients who already have children². On top of all of this, Texas restricts private insurance coverage of abortion, forcing people to pay completely out of pocket. These unnecessary delays can take weeks, forcing people to delay accessing care until later in their pregnancy.

¹ <https://indd.adobe.com/view/22baf355-02db-4a02-8ae5-b422e4547a41>

² <https://indd.adobe.com/view/22baf355-02db-4a02-8ae5-b422e4547a41>

As the COVID-19 pandemic and economic fallout ravages Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, the same people impacted by the Hyde Amendment are already marginalized by our healthcare system and systemic racism.

Many of our clients worked in the service industry and lost their jobs virtually overnight, while others work low-wage jobs that do not provide paid sick leave and lack any means to pay for their abortions.

Anti-abortion Texas officials also exploited the pandemic by banning abortion care in our state for nearly a month. During the first week of April when the ban was in effect, half of Lilith Fund callers were forced to travel out of state to receive abortion care. The average distance traveled by our clients in 2019 before the pandemic was 158 miles, about the distance from DC to Philadelphia, but during the pandemic when our callers were forced to travel out of state for their care, it increased to 635 miles, more than the distance from DC to Louisville, KY.

Even before COVID-19, almost 40 percent of Americans did not have \$400³ saved to cover an unanticipated expense. For many of our hotline callers, expenses like groceries, rent, and childcare were already difficult to afford, but with so many losing their jobs this year, paying out of pocket for an abortion can be next to impossible.

³ <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/07/20/heres-why-so-many-americans-cant-handle-a-400-unexpected-expense.html>

I know, because this stress was all too real for me. When I was 19 years old and a freshman at the University of Houston, I had an abortion. While my decision was clear, the path to coming up with the money to pay for my care was difficult and nerve-wracking. I was privileged enough to borrow money, and make an appointment.

When I arrived for my procedure, I was overwhelmed by the kind support I received from clinic escorts, the clinic staff, and my provider, who all made me feel comfortable and safe. I keep them in mind every time we are able to help someone get the care they need. Everyone having an abortion deserves to be met by people who support them and care for them in loving and respectful ways, every step of the way. We deserve to be trusted.

I also want to leave you with the story of another Texan, Rosie Jimenez, whose legacy we continue to honor in our work every day. Rosie was a beloved mother of a young child, student, and young Chicana living in McAllen, Texas in the 1970's.⁴ Rosie was enrolled in Medicaid, but Medicaid did not cover an abortion at a clinic in her hometown, due to the recently passed Hyde Amendment. Instead she sought a cheaper, unsafe procedure and ultimately died due to complications. Rosie became the first known person to die as a result of the Hyde Amendment. To be clear: **Rosie died because of Hyde.**

⁴ <https://www.texasobserver.org/rosie-jimenez-abortion-medicaid/>

When each of us can make our own decisions about our reproductive health care, when we can forge families who we love on our own terms, we have more control over our lives and our economic security. It's long past time to strip the Hyde Amendment from federal appropriations legislation and help ensure that everyone, whoever they are, wherever they live, however they get their health insurance, can get the abortion care they need without political interference.