

**House Oversight and Reform Hearing on Examining State Efforts to Undermine Access to  
Reproductive Health Care**

**November 14, 2019**

Dear Rep. William Lacy Clay,

On behalf of the 1.1 million Missourians who may experience pregnancy, we write to you in support of today's hearing before the House Oversight and Reform Committee entitled, "Examining State Efforts to Undermine Access to Reproductive Health Care." This hearing is especially important at a time when the state of Missouri, rather than seeking to ensure health care access for its residents, is actively working to impose medically irrelevant and onerous requirements on access to care.

Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri has been a leading provider, educator and protector of health care in the St. Louis region and Southwest Missouri for over 85 years. For over two decades, Reproductive Health Services of Planned Parenthood (RHS) has provided safe, legal abortion at a health center in St. Louis. And for decades, the state has sought to restrict abortion access and deny Missourians their right to choose abortion.

We appreciate your interest in access to reproductive health services in your district and for all Missourians. Thank you for demonstrating this interest by personally visiting the RHS health center in St. Louis on May 28 when the state was refusing to renew the center's annual license that was set to expire on May 30. After listening to the experienced medical providers and staff at RHS about the high-quality health care provided to patients, you rightfully questioned why the state had weaponized the regulatory and licensing process — putting Missouri on the edge of being the first state to lose legal access to abortion in the country.

It's been 46 years since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that a woman's constitutional liberty includes her right to abortion. Since then, opponents of women's health have been working tirelessly to chip away at abortion access. Planned Parenthood Advocates in Missouri applauds the committee for holding a hearing that unequivocally denounces the reckless actions of states that are passing bills that would harm women's health and decimate access to abortion.

This year has seen an increase in abortion bans introduced and passed in state legislatures. This part of a larger agenda to outlaw abortion. In May, Missouri Governor Michael Parson signed into law one of the country's most restrictive bans on abortion. Missouri joins states like Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky and Mississippi in passing extreme abortion bans. Some of these laws have no exceptions for survivors of rape and



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incest. Others would jail doctors for offering their patients care. **These laws are unconstitutional and out of step with the majority of voters, 77 percent of whom support the right to safe, legal abortion.**

In addition, the state of Missouri has imposed unnecessary restrictions that have left the entire state with only one health center licensed to provide abortion. Governor Parson's administration distorted medical realities and pushed misinformation to justify withholding Planned Parenthood's abortion facility license. The politicians in Missouri went too far and ignored best medical guidance by requiring abortion patients to undergo an additional pelvic exam. And in recent administrative hearings, Missouri health department director Randall Williams made a shocking admission under oath: he investigated menstrual cycles of Missouri women who had abortions. It is critical that today's hearing shine a light on the state's abuse of its authority, using its access to abortion reports to scrutinize the last periods of abortion patients. A state health department must seek to protect patient care, not weaponize the licensure process to achieve the ultimate goal of ending abortion access in the state of Missouri.

We are in a state of emergency for women's health in Missouri and this country. In America, the rate of death for women of reproductive age is on the rise. Missouri's maternal mortality rate is rising. Women are 50 percent more likely to die in childbirth than 30 years ago, and Black women are three to four times more likely to die than white women during pregnancy and childbirth.

Against this troubling backdrop, access to reproductive care is under attack by an unprecedented wave of legislative actions that further threaten women's health. If *Roe* is overturned, 1 in 3 women of reproductive age — more than 25 million women — would be at risk of living in states without legal access abortion. Banning abortion care will not stop abortion — it will stop safe, legal abortion; the cost will be women's lives. Barriers to reproductive care will only worsen health outcomes and exacerbate disparities and inequities.

There are significant gains to be made in increasing access to comprehensive health care, but abortion bans and medically unnecessary restrictions in Missouri and across the country do nothing to address these needs; they instead create additional obstacles for people seeking safe and legal health care. We thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to protecting sexual and reproductive health care in the state of Missouri and for your vocal participation in today's hearing.

Sincerely,

M'Evie Mead  
Director of Policy and Organizing  
Planned Parenthood Advocates in Missouri