

“The Impact of the Supreme Court’s Dobbs Decision on Abortion Rights and Access Across the United States”

House Committee on Oversight and Reform

10:00 AM, Wednesday, July 13, 2022

Statement for the Record

Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney, for holding this hearing to examine the impact of the Supreme Court’s devastating and harmful decision to overrule *Roe v. Wade*. Pregnant people have a constitutional right to make personal health care decisions for their own lives, health, and futures. That is why I held a Women’s Health Roundtable earlier this year to focus on addressing the challenges and disparities that women face when it comes to health care. I will never stop fighting to protect those fundamental rights. As a recipient of Planned Parenthood’s highest possible score on its Congressional scorecard, I am committed to codifying abortion rights and leveraging the federal government’s power to protect bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom for individuals.

On Friday, June 24, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, ending nearly a 50-year constitutional right to abortion, and for the first time ripping away a fundamental right previously provided to Americans. In this erroneous decision’s aftermath, almost half of our 50 states are planning to restrict or severely limit abortion. In Virginia, 80 percent of women live in counties that already do not have clinics that provide abortion. Governor Glenn Youngkin announced his intention to make matters worse by banning abortion after 15 weeks in Virginia. One Virginia state senator has announced his plans to introduce a “life at conception” law. This legislation, which is supported by Governor Youngkin and Republican state legislators, is an attack on science-based reproductive health care. But allow me to be very clear: In Virginia, it is still your right to seek an abortion. Virginia Democrats made sure of that. We will fight to guarantee it stays that way.

Abortion care is a standard practice of reproductive health. One in four women will receive an abortion by the age of 45, and 54 percent of abortions in the United States occur through medication, which has been used safely in the United States for 20 years. If dissenters took the time to be thoughtful and emphatic, they would know that some pregnancies can significantly endanger the life and health of individuals. It is not a black and white issue. Pregnancy can both harm those with preexisting conditions and catalyze an onset of complications. Examples include life-threatening high-blood pressure; placenta accrete, a condition when the placenta attaches to the uterus and potentially grows through and into other organs; or ectopic pregnancies, when a fertilized egg attaches somewhere outside the uterus. These conditions can lead to internal bleeding, infection, and in some cases death. Finally, forcing mothers who experience a devastating miscarriage to experience a stillborn birth is both unethical and cruel.

Banning abortion does not stop abortion – it only endangers women, and limits health care access for people of color, those in rural communities, and people with low incomes.

According to the World Health Organization, 23,000 women die from unsafe abortions each year and tens of thousands more experience significant health complications globally. In addition, a study from Duke found that banning abortion in the U.S. would lead to a 21% increase in the number of pregnancy-related deaths overall and a 33% increase among Black women, simply because staying pregnant is more dangerous than having an abortion. Lastly, about 75 percent of abortion patients are poor or low-income, and research shows that individuals who are denied abortion care and give birth experience an increase in household poverty. To ban abortion, is to declare war on the most powerless people in our communities.

As Republicans celebrate the end of *Roe v. Wade*, we must be clear-eyed about their dangerous crusade. It is not about protecting life, it is about controlling and manipulating women, their bodies, and their health care choices. If Republicans really cared about women's health, they would not relentlessly attack the Affordable Care Act and oppose Medicaid expansion. They would stop sitting idly by as a shockingly high number of black expectant mothers die from pregnancy-related causes, and they would support our efforts to extend paid family leave. Republicans in the Commonwealth of Virginia forfeited control of the General Assembly in part due to their efforts to mandate vaginal probes for individuals seeking abortion services. Time and time again, Republican lawmakers use the power of the state or state-sanctioned vigilantism to forcibly control women's access to healthcare, criminalize doctors, and chip away at any semblance of a social safety net for parents.

I am a proud supporter of the Women's Health Protection Act (H.R. 3755 and H.R. 8296), which the House is considering this week, and which would establish a federal statutory right to receive and provide abortion care services in every state. Now is the time for the Senate to act to ensure that extremist state lawmakers cannot dictate a person's ability to receive abortion care. Congress should also pass the Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance (EACH) Act, which would repeal the Hyde Amendment - a dangerous and outdated prohibition on the federal government covering abortion services for enrollees in federal insurance programs, such as Medicaid, TRICARE, or the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. I also support President Biden's executive order which preserves access to reproductive health services such as a medication abortion, emergency contraception, and protects patient privacy.

This Supreme Court weakened our Miranda Rights, nullified century-old gun safety laws, limited our ability to address the climate crisis, and reduced American women to second class citizens. This is not a conservative Court, it is a radical court, and it is as radical as it gets. It should not be harder for a pregnant woman to access reproductive care than it is for a violent individual to access an assault rifle. Our allies around the world have responded in shock and dismay as we regress in our progress to expand human rights. At the recent NATO Summit which I attended in my capacity as President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, multiple diplomats shared with me their sense of outrage about the Supreme Court's decision. We have eroded confidence in our system on the global stage. Where the United States once led on

abortion access, reproductive rights, and bodily autonomy—we now join countries like Iran, Russia, and North Korea in restricting these rights.

We must establish a statutory right to receive and provide abortion care services in the United States to prevent pushing millions of pregnancies into the shadows and endangering the lives of the one in four women who require an abortion in their lifetime. If we must eliminate the filibuster to get it done, so be it. If we miss this moment, I fear this extremist Court will come for other rights we have taken for granted, like same-sex marriage and other LGBTQ+ protections. I thank our witnesses for their time, and I look forward to their testimony.