

House Oversight Committee
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Good morning Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and members of the committee. I submit my testimony on behalf of We Testify, Jane's Due Process, and as someone who has had an abortion. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today about the devastating impact of the recent Supreme Court ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and the wave of grief, fear, and confusion that has swept the country.

My name is Sarah Lopez. I am a We Testify Abortion Storyteller and the Youth Program Manager at Jane's Due Process. We Testify is an organization dedicated to the leadership of people who have had abortions, and Jane's Due Process (JDP) helps young people in Texas navigate parental consent laws and confidentially access abortion and birth control.

On the morning of Friday, June 24, the United States Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, removing the constitutional right to abortion. It was a decision that abortion funds, clinics, and advocates knew was coming, but it didn't make the news any less heart-wrenching. Countless clinics had to tell patients in the waiting room that they could no longer help them. Many abortion funds, including Jane's Due Process, immediately paused services because of the legal uncertainty abortion laws in Texas and out of a desire to protect our clients, volunteers, and staff. And thousands of people across the country had to be turned away or cancel upcoming abortion appointments because of the cruel, anti-abortion extremism demonstrated by the far-right members of the current Supreme Court.

Those of us who have been doing this work know that this isn't a decision that happened overnight. For decades now, gutting abortion access has been the goal of anti-choice lawmakers. In states like mine, Texas, legislative session after legislative session, we have witnessed lawmakers chip away at our fundamental right to abortion. It has been a slow, concerted effort to remove access entirely. But it hasn't been enough to over-regulate abortion clinics, prevent Medicaid and private health insurance from covering abortion care, or fuel the fire by making a ban on abortion a fundraising or re-election ploy by anti-abortion officials. As a result of the *Dobbs* decision, we will now see half the states in our country lose access to abortion care.

In Texas and states that have similarly severely restricted access, we know firsthand how disastrous the impact of anti-abortion extremism is. Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs), also known as fake clinics, are unlicensed organizations that do not employ medical staff and only exist to deter people from obtaining abortion care. Crisis pregnancy centers outnumber abortion clinics 3 to 1. In Texas, CPCs get \$50 million a year in state funding, diverting

money from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families programs, which are meant to help vulnerable families meet basic needs, including food, rent, and child care.

Even before the *Dobbs* ruling, abortion was inaccessible for most Texans and is a case study for what is about to happen across the country. On September, 1 2021, Senate Bill 8 took effect. SB8 bans abortion past 6 weeks, forcing Texans either to leave the state to get an abortion or remain pregnant against their will. The first month SB 8 was in effect, abortion rates dropped by 50% for adults. And abortion rates dropped by 70-90% for anyone under 18. There has also been a 41% uptick in CPCs deceiving desperate people who need abortion care because of SB 8. One of my biggest fears is that number getting even higher now that abortion will be illegal in Texas.

I had an abortion almost 6 years ago, less than a month after graduating from college. Similar to now, there was a lot of uncertainty in this country. Donald Trump had just been elected President. I was working in a restaurant barely scraping by. When I found out I was pregnant, I knew immediately that I wanted an abortion. But the stigma around abortion made me feel like what was happening to me was beyond my control and yet also somehow my fault - a violation that I can only compare to when I was sexually assaulted as a teenager.

Prior to *Dobbs*, SB 8, and the COVID abortion ban in March 2020, Texas put in place dozens of restrictions that made accessing abortion care much more complex and difficult than it should be. The state-mandated transvaginal ultrasound that I had to receive was torture. I didn't understand why I was being asked to listen to a heartbeat when I knew I didn't want to be pregnant. I remember that the only time I could schedule the ultrasound was before work - I was a server at the time - so I went straight to work after my appointment. When I got there I went to the back and completely broke down crying. I also had to undergo a medically unnecessary 24-hour waiting period. But due to clinic closures since it was around the holidays, I actually couldn't be seen for another two weeks. When you're pregnant and you don't want to be, everyday feels more agonizing than the one before.

Pregnancy made me feel like a stranger in my own body. I chose not to tell my family because I was scared they wouldn't support me, which made the prolonged waiting period unbearable. I remember being scared when my provider told me that the state required him to tell patients that abortion causes breast cancer, depression, and infertility, later trying to reassure me by also saying that having an abortion is 100% safe and even many times safer than carrying a pregnancy to term.

Aside from all the confusion and fear that results from a state's restrictions on abortions, the abortion itself wasn't traumatic at all. I felt immediate relief afterwards. I also feel very lucky to have been supported the way I was and that I only lived 15 minutes away from a clinic.

Although the intention of abortion restrictions is to instill shame, I felt love from my partner who took me to my appointments and paid for my procedure. I felt love from my best friend who took me into her arms and told me that I didn't do anything wrong, and that she had supported friends and family members through their abortions. I felt love from the nurse who held my hand during the procedure and made sure I was comfortable. I felt love the first time I found out what an abortion fund was, and that there is a whole ecosystem of fierce advocates that do everything they can - not just to make sure that abortion access is a reality for anyone who needs one, but that people are still able to have a dignified and supportive experience despite receiving so much hostility for doing what's best for themselves.

I have been working with abortion funds for the last 4 years. First as a volunteer at Jane's Due Process, later as the program coordinator at Fund Texas Choice, and currently as the youth program manager at Jane's Due Process. But my background is not in law, or healthcare, or even advocacy really. What first led me to this work, truthfully, was that I didn't know what to make of my experience but I knew I wanted to offer people the community that I wish I had known was available when I had my abortion. It was only after getting involved with abortion funds that I learned what an abortion restriction was and was able to contextualize the difficult parts of my experience.

I've had the honor of working with some of the most amazing people I've ever met to help hundreds, if not thousands, of folks in Texas access abortion care despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Many times, I was the only person who knew that someone was having an abortion. I have helped countless people who didn't have a support system, reliable childcare, stable housing, or any method of transportation. Being forced to leave the city or state you live in to access time-sensitive healthcare like abortion takes a huge toll on people. And if you don't have basic necessities like reliable phone or internet access, a photo ID, or a bank account, it can really feel impossible to be able to get an abortion. But clinics, abortion funds and practical support funds are the networks of support which move mountains to ensure that people can still get the abortion care they need.

Jane's Due Process, the organization that I currently work for, provides free legal assistance and case management for young people in Texas seeking confidential abortion care. We have a 24/7 hotline where folks can call or text in with any questions related to pregnancy, abortion and birth control. We also have a free emergency contraceptive program. Our repro kits contain Plan B, pregnancy tests, & condoms and are distributed for free to hundreds of people each year. And we have a youth advocacy program that builds leadership skills for our former clients and centers youth voices in our work.

In addition to barriers to abortion access that all Texans must face, young people are at a particular disadvantage because Texas requires anyone under 18 to get written consent from a parent or guardian for abortion care. While the majority of youth involve a parent in

their abortion decision, for the minors we work with it is often impossible or not safe to do so. For example, some of our clients have parents who are incarcerated or undocumented and can't sign the consent form. Or we work with youth in foster care or immigration detention centers. And many of the teens we help have been told by a parent they will be kicked out of the house or forced to continue a pregnancy against their will. For these teens, confidential abortion care means getting a judicial bypass, a process that requires them to appear in front of a judge who grants them an order so they can consent to their own healthcare. Jane's Due Process helps young people through the judicial bypass process from start to finish.

Now that *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned, our work looks very different. We have had to pause services and are unsure of what if any legal support we can offer. The teens that need our help are now stuck feeling lost and alone, all while being forced to remain pregnant. But we will continue to do everything we can in accordance with the law to help young people. At Jane's Due Process, we are actively working towards a future where young people in Texas have full reproductive freedom and autonomy over their healthcare decisions.

Having an abortion was the easiest decision I've ever made. It was transformative, it was liberating, it was an act of self-love. But it also was the first time in my life that I experienced the cruelty of Texas lawmakers firsthand. It proved what Black and brown folks, incarcerated folks, trans folks, and undocumented folks are forced to reckon with every day: that Texas, the only place I've ever called home, is comprised of people in leadership that don't care about our circumstances, our survival, or our autonomy. And that same harm is being perpetuated against people in 26 states that are poised to lose abortion access now that *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned. Anti-abortion lawmakers have codified their hate into law, and it is our communities in the South and Midwest that will suffer the most.

I never would have dreamed that I would be able to tell people about my abortion, let alone sit before you here today, in this room, and talk about it. To some extent, I wish I didn't have to talk about something so personal. But my hope is that proper action is taken to honor the dignity of those who find themselves in a similar position as mine, especially people in the service industry who usually aren't paid a decent wage or receive paid time off, two things that would've made getting an abortion easier for me. I also hope that by being here today people who have abortions know that they're not alone.

Without We Testify and the incredible storytellers that I've met through my involvement, I doubt I would be able to even say the word abortion. But that's where many of us need to start. Because the more we say the word abortion, the more we talk about our shared experiences, the closer we get to dismantling abortion stigma and the systems that allow harmful bans and restrictions on abortion to persist.

I'm here today because I love Texas, I love people who have abortions, and I love my abortion fund community. We deserve better. This isn't just about abortion. It's about our right to self-determination. It's about centering pleasure in our struggle for collective liberation and reproductive justice. It's about not leaving people behind. It's about fighting back against the surveillance and subsequent criminalization of pregnancy outcomes. We deserve abortions on demand, anytime for any reason. And I guarantee you that everyone in this room knows and loves at least one person who has had an abortion.

In times like these, I often lean on the wisdom of those who have been organizing in their communities for far longer than I have. Mariame Kaba, an organizer, educator, and curator, is one of those people. She asks, "when something can't be fixed, what can be built instead?" Abortion funds were created in direct response to growing disparities to abortion care. With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, this is just another attempt by lawmakers to eradicate our autonomy and sense of self. But what these same lawmakers don't understand is that no one, no matter how much power you hold, will ever be able to eradicate our interconnectedness, our capacity to maintain hope amidst so much despair, and our unrelenting love for our people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you today.