

**NATIONAL NETWORK OF
ABORTION FUNDS**

June 3, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Testimony submitted to House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties

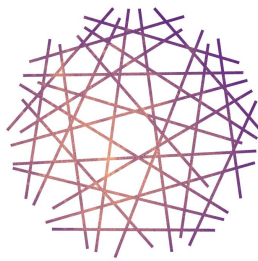
Good morning and thank you to Chairman Cohen and Ranking Member Johnson for this opportunity to share my story and bring to light the very real ways restrictions to abortion access threaten our ability to make autonomous reproductive health decisions and raise the families we want.

My name is HK Gray. I am 18 years old and I came here today all the way from Fort Worth, Texas to share my abortion story with you. I am an activist with Youth Testify, a leadership program through Advocates for Youth and the National Network of Abortion Funds. It is an honor to be able to speak before you today.

I became pregnant for the first time when I was 15 and had my daughter shortly after I turned 16. Immediately upon finding out I was pregnant, I knew I would continue the pregnancy. Despite a bit of preterm labor, my baby arrived right on time. She's in her terrible twos now and I love her. I am fortunate to have the incredible support of my fiance but becoming a parent has also had challenges, one of the hardest parts, for me, was losing my friends and not being able to attend school. I've been on my own for a few years now because my father is homeless and my mother was incarcerated. They weren't in a situation to support me legally, financially, or emotionally. I know they love me, but they're unable to parent me the way I need them to, and the state requires.

After having my daughter, I tried to get a Paragard IUD, but I was unable to because in Texas, in order to get birth control, I need my parent's consent -- something I couldn't get due to my parents' situations. And, although my doctor was sympathetic, she couldn't legally give it to me. It was an awkward conversation; here I was a parent, but I needed my own parents in order to get healthcare to prevent an unintended pregnancy. These ridiculous legal barriers made it so my doctor wasn't able to provide me with the birth control best for my situation and, of course, led me to need my abortion.

A few months later, I became pregnant again, but I miscarried. Ten months after giving birth to my daughter, I realized I was pregnant for a third time. When I told my fiancé, we both knew what the other was feeling. We couldn't afford a second child, let alone go through an entire pregnancy. It was hard enough when I had to go back to work a week after having my daughter because I didn't have paid parental leave. Raising a child is a joy, but it's also expensive and challenging. I was just starting to get the hang of raising my daughter, and wasn't ready for another. Adoption wasn't the right decision for us because if I were to continue the pregnancy, I would have wanted to raise my child and I simply couldn't afford it. The WIC, SNAP, and Medicaid programs aren't enough as it is. We decided that an abortion was the right decision for us.



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When I tried to get an abortion, I didn't realize how hard it would be. Texas requires parental consent for anyone under 18 years old. It's not that my parents would have opposed to my decision, it's that they weren't physically able to give the consent. This was a new concept to me because it's something I didn't have to do when I had my daughter. It seemed weird to me that I didn't need anyone's permission to become a parent, but I needed to prove to the state that, as a parent, I was mature enough to *not* have another child.

So, I started the process of getting a judge's approval through a judicial bypass which was long and complicated. I found Jane's Due Process an organization that helped me find a clinic and connected me to a lawyer who would walk me through the process. I had to get an ultrasound to take to court and prove that I was pregnant and how far along I was. My lawyer explained the process and we started discussing my story to build my case; we talked about what kind of mom I am, the situation with my parents, and why I needed an abortion.

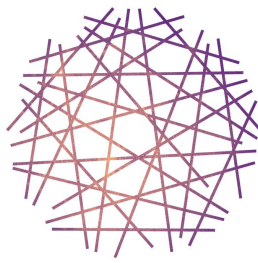
A few weeks later, when I finally went to court, it was a long day and honestly it was very hard on me. The judge said some hurtful things about me being sexually active, being a young parent, and wanting an abortion. I felt shamed no matter which decision I made.

The whole ordeal took over two hours. It was frustrating that it was weeks after I first tried to get an abortion. Forced parental involvement laws create extra barriers to abortion access and cause delays and increase the costs we pay for an abortion. The judicial bypass process is a burden and barrier to abortion access.

My actual abortion was pretty straightforward. The providers were kind and treated me like an adult, and I was glad to get back home to care for my daughter. The irony of this whole experience is that I could make medical decisions for my daughter, but not for myself. When I take my daughter to see a doctor, I'm treated like an adult, but I couldn't get routine care at the dentist or get birth control without my parents' permission.

I believe we need more support in this country for young women and transgender people who want to be able to access birth control or want to parent or want an abortion, or like me, needed all of those things at different points in my teenage years. We should be respected and trusted no matter what decision we make. Young people deserve to be heard and deserve to be leaders on reproductive health, rights and justice issues. We can tell you about all the barriers in this country, because they hit us hard.

Government restrictions on abortion hurt those of us who have fewer resources. The restrictions are harder on those who are people of color or undocumented or living with disabilities or poor or queer. It makes our abortions more expensive and makes it hard to navigate logistics. In Texas, the state prohibits all types of health insurance from covering abortion care. This means each Texan seeking an abortion must pay out of pocket. I couldn't afford my abortion, but thankfully a family member lent me the money. Like me, most people seeking abortions are already parenting and are balancing paying for child care, nutritious meals for our families, and rent. Texans seeking abortions know all about the logistical and financial challenges that come along with abortion restrictions because some 96% of counties do not have clinics that provide abortions, and nearly half of Texas women live in those counties. We need to



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not only figure out how to take time off work or school to travel to get an abortion, arrange that travel, find someplace to stay, and how to pay for all those extra expenses. We are also forced to listen to government-mandated medically inaccurate counseling, and wait 24 hours and go to the doctor twice before getting an abortion. These restrictions harm our ability to make decisions about our families that are right for us. I wish our government would create policies that make it easier for us to raise healthy families in safe communities. I wish there was more support for young parents like me; the laws as it is make it hard to have an abortion, but also make it hard for me to raise my daughter. Unlike me, the majority of people who have abortions are people of color, and we must respect their decisions. I wish there was more support for people of color who are impacted by these restrictions harder than I am.

We need more love and compassion for families and young people like me. I had a child, I had a miscarriage, and I had an abortion. As we say at the National Network of Abortion Funds, “everyone loves someone who had an abortion.” Thank you for your time and I hope my story helps you remember these laws that you pass impact your constituents, like me, and your loved ones who have abortions.