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House Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties  
Chairman, Representative Steve Cohen

Representative Cohen and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to this hearing titled “Threats to Reproductive Rights in America.”

As the now-famous saying goes, “women’s rights are human rights.”

I’m here today to give a face and a voice to women whose rights are not just being threatened, but have been under attack for the past forty-six years in our country. And, are clearly being even more heavily threatened as abortion throughout all nine months of pregnancy, with no restriction, are being introduced and celebrated in states like New York, Illinois and now, Nevada.

Today, you will hear countless stories, I suspect, about how abortion is a difficult, yet necessary decision; how every woman has the fundamental right to abortion.

Every story is important. Every experience deserves to be heard.

However, when we hear stories about abortion, the narrative is woefully one-sided. Our culture has been inundated with messaging in which abortion controls the narrative.

Yet, largely ignored in the abortion narrative that is woven so skillfully throughout our culture, behind even the words in the title of this hearing, “reproductive rights,” are stories buried beneath the narrative of abortion that has been sewn since *Roe v. Wade*.

Is there space for stories like mine, women who are alive today after surviving failed abortion procedures; for stories like my biological mother’s, women who have been coerced or forced into an abortion? Do we ever create space for the stories of women who regret their abortions?

The most important stories, though, are likely the ones that you’ll never hear. The stories of the little girls who will never live outside of the womb. In all of the discussion about women’s rights, some lose sight of the fact that without the right to life, there are no other rights. This is the greatest human rights issue we are facing as a country.

In August of 1977, the attack on my human rights began. My biological mother, as a nineteen-year-old college student, had a saline infusion abortion forced upon by her mother, a prominent nurse in their community, with the help of her colleague, the local abortionist, Dr. Kelberg.

This abortion procedure involved injecting a toxic salt solution into the amniotic fluid, that was meant to poison and scald me to death. I soaked in that toxic solution over a five day period as they tried time and time again to induce my birthmother's labor with me.

When I was finally expelled from the womb on that fifth day of the abortion procedure, my arrival into this world was not so much as a birth, but an accident, a "live birth" after a saline infusion abortion. My medical records actually state, "a saline infusion for an abortion was done, but was unsuccessful." I've included this record for you to review, along with another that identifies a complication of my birthmother's pregnancy as a saline infusion.

Despite the arguments being made that people like me don't exist or that children aren't left to die after failed abortions, listen to the words of a nurse who I've been connected with who was there that day. I was initially "laid aside," after my grandmother instructed nurses to leave me to die, and arguments about whether I would be provided medical care, ensued.

In the words of Nurse Jan, who received me in the NICU that day, "a tall blond nurse," courageously rushed me off to the NICU, shouting out, "she just kept gasping for breath, and so I couldn't just leave her there to die!"

My medical records state that the doctors initially suspected I had a fatal heart defect due to the high level of distress I presented with. I suffered from severe respiratory problems, jaundice, and seizures. I weighed in at 2 pounds, 14 ounces, which is what led a neonatologist to remark in my medical records that I was approximately 31 weeks gestation, as opposed to the 18-20 weeks that the abortionist had indicated.

It's easy to talk about women's reproductive rights until you recognize that without first the right to life, there are no other rights. How do you reconcile my rights as a woman who survived a failed abortion with what's being discussed here today?

The abortion industry talks in abstract and gray when it comes to the science of when life begins and what abortion does, but the reality is much clearer.

I'm alive today because someone else's "reproductive right" failed to end my life, as are the 287 abortion survivors I've connected with through my work with The Abortion Survivors Network, 184 of whom are female.

There's something wrong when one person's right results in another person's death. There's something deeply disturbing about the reality in our world that I have a right to an abortion but I never had the simple right to live.

The 14th Amendment says that "nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." But with states passing laws that state a "fertilized egg, embryo or fetus does not have independent rights," aren't states participating in the deprivation of life? Are states providing equal protection to all children? I don't think so. Each of you as a legislator has sworn to provide equal protection to your constituents under the law.

As you examine the so-called "threat to women's reproductive rights," I would ask for you to look behind the language and see the stories that are so often hidden, the stories that may seem inconvenient or even rare to you, and consider that there's more to this discussion.

And there's more to be done to protect your most vulnerable constituents and meet the needs of women and families in our communities in a way that supports lives at all stages of development and in all circumstances, not ends it.