

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and members of the committee. My name is Susan Johnston. I live in Cape Elizabeth and I'm here to testify in support of LD 820.

I was 18 when my world turned upside down. I got pregnant. It seems like a lifetime ago and it was--55 years! It was before *Roe v. Wade*. It was before the pill was invented. It was before birth control was legal. It was the dark ages for a woman's right to make her own decisions about pregnancy.

My boyfriend wanted to get married. He said he would quit school, get a job helping his father on his soft drink route, and we'd somehow manage. He was a good guy, but the thought of being a mother plunged me into deep depression and despair.

When we told my parents, my mother threw me out of the house. Then she relented and got scared because I was so depressed. I didn't know where to go for help, but my mother did. It turned out there was a secret network of women helping women.

My mother, pretending she was the pregnant one, told a neighbor. She knew someone who knew someone. There was a man in a small town in Pennsylvania who performed abortions. He was a doctor whose daughter had died from an illegal abortion. She was too ashamed to ask her father for help. He then dedicated himself to helping other women and girls. He did this at great risk to himself. Remember, abortion was against the law.

My Dad drove me to PA. He paid for it. I never asked how much it cost and we never spoke of it again.

I'm 73 now, and representing my generation. Many of those women were not as lucky as I was. They died. I am their voice.

Whether you decide to have an abortion or become a parent, no one should be denied health care during pregnancy. Too many of us were denied care--not by our insurance companies but by our government. By the shame and stigma our society placed on us.

I am a proud mother and grandmother of two girls. I don't want them to ever be faced with anything like what I went through.

I ask you to vote Ought To Pass on LD 820.

Thank you.