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Testimony Neither For Nor Against  
LD 530, An Act to Facilitate the Installation of Safe Haven Baby Boxes at Hospitals, Law Enforcement Facilities and  
Fire Departments  
March 2, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Mareisa Weil, I'm the Vice President for Development and Community Engagement for Maine Family Planning, and I am testifying on behalf of Maine Family Planning neither for nor against LD 530, An Act to Facilitate the Installation of Safe Haven Baby Boxes at Hospitals, Law Enforcement Facilities and Fire Departments.

Safe Haven Baby Boxes are closely tied to the anti-abortion movement, and sadly their use is going to become more common in a post-Dobbs world where access to safe, legal abortion has been stripped away from millions of women throughout the United States.

On its face, the idea of safe haven surrenders seems like a non-judgmental option for people who for whatever reason cannot care for their newborn infant. But in reality, safe haven surrenders reveal the profound cracks in our systems of care. To begin with, the need for their existence is rooted in our social tendency towards criminalization and punishment. The tacit acceptance that a person struggling with mental health (including postpartum depression, psychosis, etc), addiction, housing instability, abuse, or countless other life situations will likely face legal ramifications and criminalization if seeking to release their parental custody is the underlying assumption beneath the use of safe haven laws and baby boxes. That on its own is a tragedy that our society should reckon with before turning to anonymous solutions to obviate that unfortunate reality.

Furthermore, by the nature of their anonymity, safe haven laws deny genetic, cultural, and social identity to those who are relinquished, and rob children and families of any future hope at reunification, contraindicating best practices for kinship placement, and contravening sections of the Indian Child Welfare Act which grants first custody rights to tribal members in cases of child relinquishment.

Our intention with providing testimony today on this act is to encourage lawmakers and citizens to think more deeply about the root causes of child abandonment. As an agency that is rooted in the framework of reproductive justice, we provide services that include abortion as well as family support services such as WIC and Maine Families home visitor services. We see firsthand the challenges that people face in deciding whether to continue a pregnancy, choose adoption or parenting, etc. And from that perspective we know that there is a woefully inadequate system of support in the United States for birthing people that is particularly inadequate in serving the needs of poor people, young people, Black and Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and people without citizenship. We advocate for large scale, systemic solutions that address our systems of criminalization and punishment and increase funding and accessibility for health care and social services.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the installation and leasing of these boxes does not come without a cost, namely purchase, installation, leasing, and maintenance. Information about the parent company of Safe Haven Baby Boxes should be considered, given that this may amount to state support for anti-abortion activists. If the boxes are installed, there should be agency rulemaking to ensure their safety and maintenance.

Thank you.