

Statement of Liliana Herakova, PhD to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

May 1, 2023

LD 1619 Ought to Pass

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the joint standing committee on Judiciary, thank you for acknowledging my testimony. My name is Liliana Herakova, I live in Bangor and I am writing to testify in favor of LD 1619, "An Act to Improve Maine's Reproductive Privacy Laws." I write as someone who has had an abortion and as an educator who has supported young adults in their decision-making. Because abortion is healthcare, it should be similarly accessible and guided by the principles applying to other health services, namely: protecting patients' privacy and ensuring that this is a decision made between a qualified healthcare provider and the person(s) making the health decision. In the case of abortion – and in my own experience – this will ensure and enhance individuals', families', and communities' wellness.

First, allow me to share my own experience. In 2016, my family and I had recently moved to Maine and I was working as a lecturer at the University of Maine. I was on a fixed-length appointment, which negatively impacted my job security. My partner was pursuing an advanced degree full-time and was not working. We had a 1-year old, who was still breastfeeding, and a kindergartener who was adjusting to the many changes in his – and our family's – life. We were an immigrant, highly educated family of 4 living with my annual income of \$40,000 and managing the various health challenges our children were experiencing. In November, four months into fetal gestation, I found out I was pregnant. Despite having carried two pregnancies to term prior to that, I had not suspected I was pregnant earlier – I was on birth control when conception had occurred and I was still breastfeeding; frankly, I was still in postpartum adjustment, while being the sole earner of the family and managing various other stressors. There was no question in our minds (my partner's and mine) that abortion was the right health decision for our family at that time, and for the future. I became one of the many people in America who has children, has family support, has work, *and* needs an abortion to ensure the best possible outcomes, to continue to participate in economic and social life, and to contribute her talents and knowledge to the advancement of society.

Given how far into the pregnancy I was when we found out, the window within which I could legally access abortion in Maine was closing fast – I had less than a week left, which meant I needed the next possible appointment. Considering the gestational age, I needed a surgical procedure, which was, at the time, only offered two days a week among the few providers in the state. My initial attempts to schedule an appointment in either Bangor or Portland were unsuccessful. There were many questions I was rushing through, including how I would be able to take time off, ensure childcare, or travel far and afford healthcare, if need be. Though these are not uncommon barriers to accessing abortion, I was still in a much more fortunate position

than many hourly wage workers who risk losing their jobs or falling into debt. My fears and questions existed simultaneously with the clarity that this was a matter of wellness and survival – for me and my family. I literally cried and begged on the phone. To this day, I am deeply grateful for the understanding provider who took a whole-person and family-systems approach to the situation. They not only helped me make an informed decision, providing me with a variety of options and a space to process, but they advocated on my behalf and connected me to the resources I needed. This is what good healthcare is. Supporting LD 1619 and ensuring that abortion decisions are made by pregnant people and their providers will make such healthcare safer and more accessible.

I also write as an educator of young adults. In that role, I have supported numerous individuals before and after they have considered or received abortions (in all honesty, this happens at least once a semester). Each one of them wanted a future in which they continue their education and make their own informed decisions about if, when, and how they may bear children. Each one knew this was the right decision for them and each one of them, just like me, also felt stigmatized and afraid. This internalized stigma impacted their willingness to seek medically qualified support and advice in order to secure favorable health outcomes. Young people in Maine are afraid “others will know” and “shame” or “shun” them for accessing this most basic healthcare. This does not serve our communities and our future.

Passing LD 1619 will protect people who need to access abortion as part of their healthcare. It will ensure that qualified medical providers are able to counsel and care for patients, removing arbitrary time criteria. Voting in support of LD 1619 is giving your vote for a healthier Maine. Thank you for your time and consideration.