

Statement of Julia McDonald, DO, MPH 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 hearing my testimony today. My name is Dr. Julia McDonald. I am a full spectrum family medicine physician here in Maine. I am faculty at one of this state's medical residencies and professor at two medical schools. I am a Colby alumna who also attended the University of Maine system, then, on a scholarship from FAME Maine, went to medical school in this state. I did this – and remain here in Maine as a primary care doctor – because I believe in taking care of Mainers.

In my practice, I offer pre-conception counseling and care for patients during their pregnancies. When the pregnancies are healthy and desired, I deliver their babies, then I care for their families: the kids, the parents, the grandparents. But not all pregnancies are healthy or well-timed, so I also take care of the people who need miscarriage management or abortion care. In addition to working at two independent abortion clinics in Maine, I provide abortion care throughout pregnancy in several US states as well as globally with an international humanitarian aid agency. I am an expert in this field. I am here, on behalf of my patients and Maine families, to encourage you to vote in support of LD 1619.

In conversations about abortions later in pregnancy, many people unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the subject bring up ludicrous hypotheticals that are divorced from actual medicine. Let's remember that the vast majority (92 out of 100) abortions occur very early in pregnancy. Passing this bill will not change that. Passing this bill will NOT increase the number of abortions later in pregnancy, but it will allow those very few patients who desperately need these services to stay here, in Maine, and receive care from their trusted doctors like me. As I have worked around the world, I have taken care of patients who need abortions later in pregnancy for so many reasons that we don't have time to list them today.

As a scientist, I seek clear logical answers to complex problems. I want data that is irrefutable. But as a physician, I witness a range of human experience that is nuanced and intensely individualized, and often bewilderingly inexplicable. The moment we attempt to legislate specifics, especially medical specifics that use imperfect and non-scientific language, we immediately begin to define a need for exemptions. For example, the idea of fetal viability is complex and dependent on a multiplicity of factors: fetal wellbeing and compatibility with eventual life outside the womb, maternal health and ability to carry a pregnancy to term, accessibility and availability of resources throughout a pregnancy and at the moment of delivery, an uncomplicated and safe birth – even then, when it seems that everything should be perfect – even then sometimes we witness fetal demises. Furthermore, viability at the NICU in Portland is different than viability on Passamaquoddy Pleasant Point is different than viability with a very early preterm delivery in the County. The moment we attempt to place limitations or exemptions on human experience, we are subjecting people to someone else's morality. That is neither medicine nor science. Since it is impossible to legislate every pregnancy experience, doctors and other medical professionals must be trusted to use our best judgment. This bill will do that.

I imagine you have heard from many dissenters today, the vast majority of whom do not interact on a daily basis with patients and some of whom do not even live here. People from "Away"

should not have a say in what happens here in Maine. With all due respect to you for the complex work you do to ensure liberty for Mainers and function of our state, politicians should not be making medical decisions. I am an expert in this field. I have been directly providing abortion care for over twenty years and I know that health care, including abortion, is a basic and necessary human right. LD 1619 moves us closer to this vision in Maine and makes it clear that medical professionals, like me, are trusted to provide care that is in our best judgment. Please vote ought to pass.

Julia McDonald
Augusta
LD 1619

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