

January 22, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary.

My name is Anne Gass and I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 780, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Protect Personal Reproductive Autonomy. I'm an independent historian who has written two books on women's fight for voting rights, one of them focused on Maine. I also serve as Chair of Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), although this testimony is not submitted on behalf of the PCSW. I come to this discussion of LD 780 with an understanding of women's history and its connections to the present.

My mother's family has been in Maine for many generations. One of my great-grandmothers, whose children were born in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, used to say that she had four children and would have had more, but she "had a country doctor who understood." She was fortunate to have had that wise physician. Many women were not so lucky.

Women have always sought to end unwanted pregnancies. That's never changed. What has changed is the extent to which that vital care has been available. And how women seeking to end unwanted or nonviable pregnancies have been treated. The Roe v. Wade decision made abortions more available and less judged for almost 50 years.

When the US Supreme Court overturned Roe, it forced women in other states to cross state lines, sometimes at great hardship and expense, to find the reproductive care they need. We've seen state legislatures pass laws that ban abortions, ban them after a defined number of weeks, and offer "exceptions" that don't work because doctors and hospitals are threatened with criminal prosecution for providing abortions. Some states have criminalized helping women and girls access reproductive care in other states. It makes no difference whether the fetus is viable or not; in far too many states mothers are still forced to carry to term their babies who will die in their arms immediately after birth, in agony, because they cannot live.

The needless harm and suffering these extreme laws have inflicted are just the starting point. Extremists across the country have made clear their intent to breathe new life into the Comstock Laws, passed 150 years ago, which banned both abortion and contraception.

I had three miscarriages before the cause was correctly diagnosed and I received the medication I needed to maintain my pregnancies. In some states I might be prosecuted for somehow injuring my fetuses; that's happening now in other states to women who miscarry.

My daughter experienced an ectopic pregnancy a few years ago. This is a condition that never results in a viable pregnancy, and which can cause maternal injury and death if left untreated. In some states, my daughter might have been unable to receive the emergency D & C she needed until she was in imminent danger of death. This is unconscionable.

Some people have assured me that "Maine will never ban abortion," but I'm certainly not willing to gamble on that assurance based on what else is happening around the country.

We know that almost two-thirds of Maine voters support abortion. This is an issue that voters should decide, not the legislature. Please support LD 780, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Protect Personal Reproductive Autonomy, and send it to the voters.