



STATE OF MAINE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
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AUGUSTA, MAINE
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January 22, 2024

Senator Anne Carney, Chair
Representative Matt Moonen, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

I am writing to express my strong support for L.D. 780, *Resolution, Proposing An Amendment to the Constitution of the State of Maine To Protect Personal Reproductive Autonomy*. I would like to thank Senator Vitelli for sponsoring this Resolution as well as the other cosponsors of L.D. 780.

On this day fifty-one years ago, the Supreme Court issued its landmark decision in *Roe v. Wade*, establishing the right to abortion in the U.S. Constitution. That longstanding precedent was overturned by the Court in 2022 in the case *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, thus dismantling the legal protection of access to abortion as a federal right. Since then, many states have seized on this wrongheaded decision to launch an unprecedented barrage of attacks on access to abortion and other reproductive health care.

In the year since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, more than a dozen states have enacted extreme bans on abortion. As a result, in America today, nearly one-third of women no longer have access to abortion. While it is easy to believe that these attacks on reproductive rights only exist beyond our state's borders, there have been bills in this 131st Legislature to restrict reproductive rights by forcing ultrasounds, by mandating biased counseling, by taking away insurance coverage for abortion for low-income people, and by restricting access to abortion for rural women. We turned back these attempts to undermine reproductive rights in Maine and, instead, we have preserved and expanded reproductive freedom in Maine.

However, no matter how strong our laws may be, they are subject to everchanging political tides and can be repealed. That is why, without any such federal protection, it is critical that Maine people be assured that reproductive autonomy be protected to the greatest extent possible in the state – through an amendment to the Constitution of the State of Maine. Indeed, many of us would argue that Maine's Constitution already protects reproductive rights, but the language of L.D. 780 would remove any debate. If enacted, Maine voters would then have the opportunity to affirm the following in our state Constitution:

Every person has a right to reproductive autonomy. Neither the State nor any political subdivision of the State may deny or infringe a person's right to reproductive autonomy unless the denial or infringement is justified by a compelling state interest and is accomplished using the least restrictive means necessary. Nothing in this section narrows or limits a person's right to privacy or equal protection.

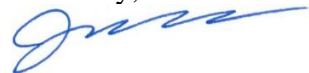
I believe Maine voters should have this opportunity.

As you know, I grew up in rural, western Maine, in Farmington. I loved growing up there, and it is still my home today and a big part of who I am, but it was by no means a hotbed of women's rights activism when I came of age. This was during a time when abortion was still illegal, when women across Maine who found themselves unexpectedly pregnant and in need had nowhere to turn, and when an abortion involved clandestine, dangerous arrangements.

It was a time when birth control was virtually impossible to obtain, especially in rural Maine where the local doctor or the pharmacist was likely a neighbor, and when the best method to avoid pregnancy, women were told, was to be "extremely careful."

While not without struggle, we've made progress over the years. But we find ourselves once again facing the real fear of regressing – of returning to the time when women's health was of secondary concern. We have an obligation to prevent that from happening and to protect and defend the right to reproductive health care. This action is needed now more than ever. That is why I support enshrining the right to reproductive autonomy in the Maine Constitution and urge you pass L.D. 780, so that Maine people can make their own decisions about their own fundamental rights.

Sincerely,



Janet T. Mills
Governor