



Consumers for Affordable Health Care

Advocating the right to quality, affordable
health care for all Mainers.

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**Statement of Ceilidh Shea
Consumers for Affordable Health Care
To the Joint Standing Committee On Judiciary**

Speaking in support of:

LD 780, Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Protect Personal Reproductive Autonomy

January 22nd, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee On Judiciary, thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments in support of LD 780, An Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Protect Personal Reproductive Autonomy.

My name is Ceilidh Shea and I am a Policy Advocate at Consumers for Affordable Health Care, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates the right to quality, affordable health care for every person in Maine. CAHC is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded in 1988 and based in Augusta whose mission is to advocate the right to quality, affordable health care for every person in Maine. As designated by Maine's Attorney General, CAHC serves as Maine's Health Insurance Consumer Assistance Program (CAP), which operates a toll-free HelpLine. Our HelpLine, fields approximately 6,000 calls and emails every year from people across Maine who need help obtaining, keeping, using, or fixing problems with private health insurance or with accessing or affording health care services. CAHC also serves as the Ombudsman program for Maine's Medicaid program, MaineCare, and helps people apply for and navigate the enrollment process for MaineCare. It is with that background that we provide these comments.

This amendment would give voters the opportunity to explicitly enshrine reproductive autonomy in our state constitution. That includes the right to make personal, private family decisions with guidance from medical experts and without interference from politicians and judges, including decisions about starting a family, birth control, fertility treatment, and abortion care.

In the long session of the 131st legislature, it was made clear that Maine must strengthen access to abortion; we heard from Mainers like Diana Pierce who needed to travel to Colorado for an abortion after learning 32 weeks into her pregnancy that her unborn son had a fatal condition that would not allow him to survive. As this committee knows, legislation was passed to ensure pregnant Mainers have access to medical care, including abortion, without restrictions on timing. This was and is an important step towards ensuring all Maine people have the right to health care. However, laws can be repealed, regardless of how strong they are. The fate of laws is determined election to election and are subject to shifting, often volatile political climates. Despite the progress we've made, the laws we've passed are not guaranteed past the next election. For this reason, it is critical that we provide Maine voters the opportunity to weigh in and affirm that Maine's constitution protects reproductive rights, regardless of changes to administration.

Through our HelpLine, we hear from Mainers struggling to make sense of health insurance coverage and the health care system in Maine as a whole. Although this needs improving, what should never be



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confusing or unclear to Mainers is whether they can access their fundamental right to receiving medically appropriate care decided upon between themselves and their provider. This includes access to abortion. In light of recent decisions coming out of the United States Supreme Court, it's of the utmost importance that Mainers are provided the opportunity to ensure the longevity of abortion access in our state so that pregnant people here are never forced to travel out of state, or forgo, the health care they need.

In states where voters decide, we see reproductive autonomy continue to win. In all states, both Republican and Democratically controlled, where similar measures have been attempted post-Dobbs, voters have overwhelmingly voted in favor of reproductive autonomy. In fact, 2 in 3 Americans say they would vote to enshrine abortion in their state's constitution.¹ In Maine, the majority of people support abortion generally and abortion later in pregnancy by wide margins.² We have an obligation to ensure every Mainer has the right to access the health care they need, when they need it, and to protect their rights to bodily autonomy.

It is for these reasons that I urge you to support LD 780. Thank you for your time.

¹ <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-maine-action-fund/press-releases/poll-2-in-3-americans-would-vote-to-enshrine-right-to-abortion-in-state-constitution-nbsp>

² <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-maine-action-fund/press-releases/poll-majority-of-mainers-support-expanding-access-to-abortion-later-in-pregnancy>