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Senate Majority Leader

THE MAINE SENATE
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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Teresa S. Pierce. I serve as Senate Majority Leader, representing Senate District 25, which includes Falmouth, Cumberland, North Yarmouth, most of Yarmouth, Gray, and Long Island.

I am writing in strong opposition to several proposals before the committee today: LD 253, LD 682, LD 886, LD 887, LD 975, LD 1007 and LD 1154. Taken together, these proposals are an assault on fundamental freedoms and put the lives of people across our state at risk. Ranging from roadblocks that discourage people from seeking health care to outright bans on and criminalization of abortion, this legislation is not what Maine people want or deserve.

These bills undermine a commonsense principle: politicians are not the people who should be making the fundamental decision about if, when and how Mainers should start a family. It is up to those individuals and their medical providers acting within the professional standards of care. I have had many careers before coming to the Legislature – I’ve worked in education, non-profits and banking. None of those experiences qualify me, as a legislator, to make decisions about other people’s reproductive health care.

This legislation is not only a threat to our rights and freedom, but a threat to the safety and wellbeing of all Mainers. Since the Supreme Court struck down *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, several states have eliminated or severely restricted access to abortion care. In Georgia, we’ve heard the heartbreaking stories of Amber Nicole Thurman and Candi Miller, whose deaths were entirely preventable, were it not for the State’s oppressive abortion ban. Maine can not and should not go down that path.

Restrictions on reproductive care don’t just threaten the health of pregnant people, they threaten health care access for all Mainers by reducing our medical workforce. From 2023-2024, after Alabama enacted an abortion ban, applicants for OB-GYN residencies in the state dropped 21.2%. In Maine, 13 of 16 counties already face a clinician shortage. Actions that would further reduce the availability of doctors in our state would be a step in the wrong direction. Instead, we must take action to keep our already fragile systems of care afloat. This year, I’ve introduced legislation to fund our family planning centers. While this legislation does not fund abortion care, it supports the family planning centers that provide basic primary care and essential reproductive care services like birth control, cancer screenings, and testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections.

To me, these bills raise a lot of questions that I hope my colleagues consider. Why would we want to restrict access to fundamental health care? Why would we want our government to reach into the lives of Maine people and make very personal decisions for them? Why on earth, as LD 975 proposes, would we jail people for receiving abortion care and repeal the crime of elevated aggravated assault on a pregnant person? Why would we turn our backs on the will of Maine people by making our state a less safe, less healthy, and more restrictive place? I cannot think of a justifiable answer – accordingly, I strongly oppose these attacks on reproductive freedom.