

Kathryn E. Sharpless, MD, PhD

Yamouth, ME

January 22, 2024

LD780 Testimony

Why do we need a constitutional amendment to protect reproductive autonomy?

For my entire professional medical career, up until 19 months ago, with almost 50 years of legal precedent since Roe v. Wade, the United States Constitution was interpreted to protect rights to privacy, life, liberty and equal protection for pregnant people. These protections are now gone since the Dobbs decision. Who will get to decide if Maine's constitution is strong enough to provide these protections to pregnant people in Maine?

We must not let the Maine constitution be misinterpreted.

This bill would make explicit that people have the right to make personal, sometimes complex, medical decisions about their own health based on their own unique circumstances. These medical decisions include deciding if and when to start a family, using a birth control of one's choice, seeking treatment for infertility, accessing abortion care, undergoing gender-affirming care, and having control over one's own body during pregnancy, labor and delivery.

It means explicitly forbidding forced C-sections, forced sterilizations, and forced births. It means explicitly guaranteeing access to emergency care for individuals with ectopic pregnancies and life-saving care for patients with previable preterm premature rupture of membranes, to name a few of the life-threatening complications that can occur during pregnancy.

For these reasons, I support LD780, a "Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Protect Personal Reproductive Autonomy."

As a Mainer, as a mother, and as an obstetrician/gynecologist, I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD780 and to let Maine voters decide whether or not to strengthen the Maine constitution when it comes to reproductive autonomy. We must not allow the Maine constitution to be misconstrued.