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People Policy Solutions

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Testimony in Support of LD 780, *Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Protect Personal Reproductive Autonomy*

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Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Alex Carter, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit civil legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 780 and on behalf of the Maine people with low-income we represent.

We find ourselves in a moment of political contradictions. Many of the same lawmakers who espouse personal responsibility and tell marginalized people to make the so-called ‘right choices’ to change their economic circumstances are simultaneously working to constrain the essential freedom to determine our futures—the right to choose when, whether, and how to start a family. Reproductive autonomy is the power to act on decisions about one’s own reproduction, including pregnancy, the use of contraception, fertility treatment, and abortion care.¹

The link between economic inequality and reproductive autonomy is clear. Groups already more marginalized in our healthcare system, including people with low-income and people of color, are more likely to experience an unintended pregnancy,² have higher incidents of adverse maternal health outcomes,³ and make up a higher percentage of abortion patients relative to their percentage of the population.⁴ Mainers with low-income are already struggling to make ends meet and we know an unintended pregnancy or medical complication can further exacerbate their economic insecurity.

One of the most rigorous national studies conducted by Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health, was designed to assess women who were able to get an abortion versus women who were denied a wanted abortion and the relationship with socioeconomic

¹ <https://reproductiverights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Final-14th-Amendment-Report-7.26.22.pdf>

² <https://www.gutmacher.org/fact-sheet/unintended-pregnancy-united-states#:~:text=Unintended%20pregnancy%20rates%20are%20highest,women%20and%20women%20of%20color.&text=Rates%20tend%20to%20be%20lowest,college%20graduates%20and%20married%20women.>

³ <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/racial-disparities-in-maternal-and-infant-health-current-status-and-efforts-to-address-them/#:~:text=Research%20has%20documented%20that%20social,of%20mortality%20among%20Black%20infants.>

⁴ <https://www.gutmacher.org/2023/01/inequity-us-abortion-rights-and-access-end-roe-deepening-existing-divides>

outcomes. The majority of participants were already experiencing economic hardship when they sought an abortion and the most commonly cited reason for wanting to terminate an unintended pregnancy was not having enough money to care for a child or for another child.⁵ The study also found that those who were denied an abortion had three times greater odds of being unemployed than women who received a desired abortion and that years after an abortion denial families experience an increase in household poverty and are more likely to lack the money to pay for basic expenses like food, housing, and transportation.⁶

Following the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision, states across the country have moved to restrict, criminalize, and outright ban abortion and other forms of reproductive healthcare. Maine voters have affirmed again and again that they want greater access to healthcare, not less, and that they support an individual's right to make their own personal, private medical decisions without the interference of politicians. Maine recently passed laws to protect and strengthen reproductive health access and we believe our state constitution already protects the right to reproductive autonomy. However, laws can be repealed, and in this political climate we cannot allow our fundamental rights to be up for debate. This constitutional amendment would make explicit what we already know to be true: reproductive rights are human rights.

In the absence of federal protections, the state must move to ensure that every Mainer, regardless of their income or address, has the same rights to reproductive autonomy. I urge you to pass LD 780 and allow Maine voters to decide what their constitution stands for. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.

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⁶ https://www.ansirh.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/the_harms_of_denying_a_woman_a_wanted_abortion_4-16-2020.pdf