

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Judiciary Committee, My name is Stephanie Flash and I am a nurse working and living in Portland, Maine. I am here today to urge you to vote ‘Ought to Pass’ on LD 780.

As a registered nurse I do not believe that any basic health care rights should be up for debate or at the whim of shifting political winds. As a person with a uterus I do not believe that my choices over what happens to me and my body should be decided by anyone other than myself and a medical provider.

My story with reproductive health care began in high school when I was able to have education and access to safe and effective birth control, allowing me to go to school, live my life, and achieve my career goals. Several years later access to reproductive health care allowed my partner and I to start planning a family, on a timeline that worked for us.

When I first became pregnant, in addition to the joy and excitement, I can still remember thinking very clearly that if I did not want this possible being growing inside me, or if I did not have safety and support in my life, this would be torture. It was, and still is, unimaginable to me that women could be forced to go through 9 months of even just the “minor” symptoms of pregnancy, let alone the more permanent ones, including risk of disability and death, without any other option.

My story continues a few weeks later when I had a first, and then second, ultrasound in which it was determined that my pregnancy was no longer progressing and the embryo inside would never become a life. As devastating as this was to me, I was so thankful to be in a provider’s office where I was given accurate evidence-based medical options as to how to proceed. It was determined that I needed a Dilation & Curettage, or D&C, or I risked the possibility of uterine infection, sepsis, and death. Thankfully, one was available to me at that very day and time. It is quite possible therefore that the only reason I am here today to tell this story is that I had immediate quality care available to me by a provider that was trained and legally not at risk for providing the procedure I needed.

If the laws were different and any of these reproductive health care choices had not been available to me there is a very strong possibility I would be in a very different place in my life than I am now. Everyone should be able to make their own decisions about their reproductive healthcare and how, when, and if they decide to start a family. A reproductive autonomy amendment would explicitly enshrine Mainers’ rights to do that in the state constitution and so I strongly urge you to pass LD 780.