

Soleil LeRiche
Pownal, Maine
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Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Soleil LeRiche. I am a resident of Pownal and a member of my school's Student Activist club at Freeport High School. I strongly oppose LD 975 and all other related bills highlighted in this hearing concerning abortions in Maine.

I am obligated to begin by reminding this committee that reproductive care is essential, life-saving healthcare. As a woman, I am terrified that I could lose my right to receive a safe and legal procedure, something I once felt confident that would be protected in Maine. Abortions are not only for convenience, as some would lead us to believe, but often these procedures are done to save the life of the mother; or prevent a child with debilitating health defects from a life of inevitable pain, suffering and often an early death.

As we all know, Maine is home to the oldest population in the nation, and we face significant challenges, including a shrinking workforce and rising poverty levels. Restrictions on abortion and the criminalization of reproductive rights will only exacerbate these issues. Young people will be further discouraged from moving to Maine for higher education or employment opportunities that will strengthen our economy, knowing that their fundamental rights could be taken away.

As a junior in high school looking at universities across the country, I've been discouraged that my educational choices are being so limited because fewer states are preserving my right to have control over my own body. I've always felt that the protections over healthcare in Maine have acted as a support system for me and countless others. Knowing that I can still receive an excellent education in Maine whilst still maintaining my fundamental rights over my body has been a comfort in these times where women's rights for healthcare, vote, and representation are under attack. The introduction of these bills feel like the floor has been taken out from under me, and I no longer have anything to fall back on. It feels like not only is the state I love turning its back on me, but also telling me that by just being a woman I'm like a criminal who's activities need to be tracked by the government.

The prospect of this invasive and harmful legislation is alarming, and it undermines the autonomy and safety of hundreds of thousands of people. Maine should be a state that young generations can view as a safe haven for reproductive rights and personal autonomy, not as a place where reproductive health can be criminalized, and where invasive tracking of medical procedures could take place (as presented in LD 975).

Thank you for your time and consideration.