

Good Morning,

My name is Katherine Schuette and I am here representing myself.

I am here today because I oppose Senate Bill 164, the Down Syndrome Abortion Ban and House Bill 258, the Six Week Abortion Ban.

I oppose these bills or any other bills that attempt to restrict a woman's constitutional right to access safe and legal abortions. I am here today because these bills threaten the health and lives of women in this state.

I am an Iraq War Veteran, I served on Active Duty as a Military Intelligence Officer from 2008 to 2012. I am also an Active Duty spouse; my husband is still currently serving on Active Duty. In 2009 I deployed to Iraq for a 12-month deployment. During my deployment I became pregnant. There were a few things that quickly became apparent to me:

- I did not want to have a child
- I couldn't tell anybody
- I wanted to fulfill my obligation to my soldiers, my unit but most importantly to myself

I did what I never thought I would have to do, I googled how to self-abort. I was scared and desperate and yet the irony was not lost on me, here I was fighting for my country, fighting for freedom, and yet I wasn't completely free to make a decision about my own body. I wasn't completely free because of the judgement that would stem from me informing my leadership about my pregnancy and decision to have an abortion AND because of the obstacles I knew I would face when I returned to the states.

1. If I would have informed my leadership that I was pregnant I would have been relieved of my duties and sent home for the remainder of the deployment, even if I was being sent home to have an abortion. In my case I didn't know I was pregnant until 8 weeks into the pregnancy.
2. After being sent home, which would have taken at least an additional 1 week logistically speaking, I would've been required to find my own abortion care provider and pay for my abortion out of pocket. The Department of Defense's policy on abortion is that the military does not permit abortions on military medical facilities or permit the use of insurance for abortions unless it is a result of rape or incest. Had I lived in Ohio and this six-week abortion ban was in effect, I would not have been able to get a safe and legal abortion.

Ultimately, I didn't have to do any of this. In the midst of my desperation, when I googled how to self-abort, by some miracle, I picked a link to a legitimate international organization that provides women in third world countries access to a safe and legal abortion. I am reminded everyday how close I was to clicking on a link or doing something that could have killed me. Instead I was referred to a licensed doctor and nurse who via email walked me through a step by step process on how to have a medical abortion. So in Iraq, during my 7 days a week, 16 hour shifts, alone in my room, during the middle of the war I had an abortion.

Despite how scary this entire experience was for me, I am thankful to be here today to share this story with you so that someday, women will never have to go through what I went through. I am proud of my decision, I did what was best for me.

I tell you this story because I hope that you will be reminded that this issue of restricting access to abortion is about real lives, the lives of women like myself. If you pass these bills you are threatening the lives of women, women who deserve your protection. I served my country, my husband is serving our country for the freedom of choice, for the right to choose what I do with my body. Bills like these, that restrict women's access to abortion, that put an arbitrary clock on when you can and can't have an abortion, will create serious issues for women in all situations, but even more so for women in the military whether they are deployed or not.

- 97% of servicewomen are of reproductive age
- Servicewomen experience a higher number of unintended pregnancies than civilian women

Women in the military are often not aware of the DOD's abortion policy, which could cause delays in treatment because they would have to seek treatment outside of military medical facilities. A six-week abortion ban significantly limits a woman's choice to have a safe and legal abortion, but especially women in the military who have less options than civilian women.

To close out my statement today, I'm here to ask you: Please don't create a situation where women in this state will seek substandard and unsafe care to end their pregnancy, please don't create a situation where women in this state will have no choice but to google how to self abort, and please don't create a situation where desperate women in this state, like I once was, will do anything to end their pregnancy.

Please don't pass Senate Bill 164 and House Bill 258, women's lives depend on it.

Katherine Schuette