

H.B. 258 Opposition Testimony of Mariely Neris Rodriguez
Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee
December 5, 2018

Unlike most women I know, and many women who become pregnant, I knew something was different right away. I took a pregnancy test and it came out positive. I was in disbelief. Three months prior to that, I had undergone major stomach surgery. As part of my post-surgery indications, my doctor told me I should not get pregnant for at least two years, because a pregnancy could post potential risks to myself and/or the fetus.

Prior to my surgery, I had worked overseas, in the non-profit sector, for over seven years. When my contract ended, I returned home, to Ohio, to take care of my health, and be close to family. Because I needed surgery, I decided to opt into COBRA to keep my health coverage, which I knew would cover my procedure. The cost was massive. I paid over \$700 a month in COBRA payments. In addition, I had a mortgage, home insurance, taxes, utility bills, food costs, and other miscellaneous expenses I had to cover with my savings. The unemployment benefits helped, but it was a struggle: surgery recovery, job search, self-care, remaining responsible.

It was early 2014, and although the ACA was law, the provision ensuring birth control coverage for women had not yet been approved. I was in a long-term relationship at the time, and knew I had to be on birth control to avoid pregnancy. Because of my surgery I also couldn't take contraceptive pills and therefore would need an IUD, which cost upwards of \$1000, a sum I could not afford with my limited income and ongoing responsibilities.

My former employer was a faith-based organization and did not, as a matter of course, cover contraception for their employees. They made exceptions for unique medical cases, and I thought my case would be covered under the exceptions. I was wrong. I applied for coverage and was denied. My first appeal was denied. My second appeal was also denied. It was during my plan to appeal a third time that I had that funny feeling something was different, and discovered I was pregnant. I went to a local Planned Parenthood office and they confirmed the pregnancy (my third pregnancy test).

I knew right away I would need an abortion. I was unemployed and recovering from a major surgery that could prove disastrous if I carried a pregnancy. My then-partner was also unemployed, adding to our struggle. Planned Parenthood referred me to Preterm, an independent clinic that offers abortion services in the Cleveland area. We made an appointment and met with a social worker, filled out extensive paperwork and got an ultrasound. These are all requirements to comply with in the 1 of 2 appointments one must make to have an abortion in Ohio. During that first appointment, though my pregnancy test (the fourth) was also positive, they could not find a fetus in the ultrasound. The clinician told me the reason was probably because I was too early in my pregnancy. Probably about 5 weeks along. She said I'd have to wait an extra week, week 6 of pregnancy, for them to do another ultrasound, find the fetus, and then schedule me for the procedure. That meant I had to have three appointments, instead of the usual bothersome two.

We went back home disappointed. But a week later, at week 6, the ultrasound showed the fetus and I was able to schedule and successfully have an abortion. Because I was unemployed, I also qualified for a program to receive a cost-free IUD, for which I was very grateful. My abortion was the best decision for me, emotionally, medically, and financially.

So, why am I taking you through this long story to talk to you about my opposition to the 6-week abortion ban? Because my case was probably the best-case scenario for finding out pregnancy. I was really early on, about 4 weeks gestation. I got to the doctor early, at about 5 weeks gestation... and I was still NOT able to get an abortion. Given my example, I can also see this 6-week abortion ban for what it truly is: An obvious attempt at making abortion care illegal in all cases, and for all women.

The 6-week abortion ban is not only directly designed in opposition to current court precedence, to challenge *Roe v. Wade*, and to invite the U.S. Supreme Court to allow states to outlaw abortion prior to fetal viability; it is also an outright attempt at cutting access to health care, putting the most vulnerable women at risk, and making it impossible for women to make personal decisions about when and how they'd like to be pregnant and what is best for them and their families.

No matter what the details of the abortion ban legislation are, they are just another step in a clear strategy to ban abortion entirely and advance an unpopular agenda. Despite the fact that polls consistently show that 7 in 10 Americans support legal access to abortion, the groups and many of the politicians behind these bans have made no secret of the fact that their core objective is to ban all abortion, including in cases of rape and incest, and even when a woman's health is at risk. But if they truly were concerned about reducing the need for abortion, they would stop opposing greater access to contraceptives, fight for accurate sex education, and work for common sense measures that support working families. These bans are not about protecting women's health and well-being. They are about advancing a political and ideological agenda.

I oppose the 6-week-abortion ban wholeheartedly. You should too. It is what is best for women and their families, and it is what most Americans support.

Sincerely,
Mariely Neris- Rodriguez
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