

Good morning Chairman Bacon, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. My name is Mallory McMaster and I'm here today to talk with you about SB 145, a bill that bans a certain type of abortion procedure in Ohio.

I'm standing in front of you at 7 months pregnant. I spent the weekend shopping for baby furniture and putting the finishing touches on my 11-page birth plan. This will be my first child, and my husband and I can't wait for our family to grow. Underneath my excitement, though, I can't help but feel deep concern for the state of abortion rights in Ohio. Laws like SB 145 have been chipping away at abortion access for women in our state for several years. When these laws are passed, the range of reproductive healthcare options for women narrows, and experiences like mine become even more rare.

I want you to understand that this pregnancy wouldn't be possible if I hadn't had an abortion several years ago. At that time, I was trapped in a physically violent marriage. I had absolutely no intentions of starting a family with the person I was married to, so I continued to use the same oral birth control method I'd used successfully since high school. Somehow, I got pregnant anyway. By that point, I knew I needed to leave the marriage but I didn't know how. I did know, however, if I continued the pregnancy, the child and I would never really be safe from the abuse I'd experienced for years. Making the decision to have an abortion was easy for me. In fact, I often tell people it was the best decision I've ever made.

Laws like SB 145 are making it impossible for women in Ohio to have the same safe, comfortable experience accessing the healthcare they need that I had. By continuing to insert politicians between doctors and their patients, laws like this are compromising doctors' ability to provide the best possible care and ultimately putting patients at risk.

My life has changed quite a bit since I had my abortion. I found the courage and the resources to leave my abusive marriage. I got a degree that allowed me to pursue a career I love, I remarried, and we bought a beautiful home with plenty of room for our growing family. My husband and I didn't make the decision to grow our family on a whim. We're organized, methodical people and we try to evaluate the pros, cons, and outcomes of every choice we face.

One of the biggest factors in our decision process was our families' complex medical histories. The list of diseases, conditions, and premature deaths in our family trees spilled over onto two pages. Before we decided to try to get pregnant, I met with a geneticist and a high-risk pregnancy specialist to gauge the likelihood of us having a healthy child. After a \$10,000 test to determine if I had any genetic predisposition to some of the most common hereditary conditions, they gave us a green light but did stress the importance of the 20-week anatomy scan to screen for any issues.

My husband and I made sure we were both on the same page before I removed my IUD. We decided to start trying knowing that we would have an abortion if the fetus had any major chromosomal, anatomical, or genetic problems so we wouldn't bring our child into the world to

face a potential lifetime of pain and suffering. After a few months of planning, testing, charting, and trying, my pregnancy test turned positive. We were elated! Later that evening, I sat in my bed watching the Ohio Legislature pass a 6-week abortion ban immediately followed by a 20-week abortion ban.

I panicked.

I'd done everything "right." I was financially secure. I was married. I had great health insurance. Prenatal vitamins. Dental exams. Yoga classes. Dog training. Not cleaning the litterbox. I stopped eating sushi. Everything society tells women they have to do if they want to be a good mother, I did. Yet still, somehow, it wasn't enough. That legislation, a measly piece of paper, suddenly stood between me and my ability to protect my child.

That night, I considered having an abortion before the law went into effect. I was desperate to do everything possible to keep my child safe, even if it meant terminating the pregnancy. I came to the conclusion that I wasn't going to let legislators who have never met me prevent me from becoming a parent on my terms. I mapped out the closest abortion clinics in nearby states and saved a mental list of places that could help me if doctors in my own state suddenly could not. This was far from an ideal solution, given the fact that even though I lived less than 2 miles from one of the best abortion clinics in the country, I would still have to miss extra work, drive hundreds of miles, and stay in a lonely hotel to get the care I needed. I told myself I was "lucky" enough to have the financial and emotional support necessary to do that, but I didn't feel very lucky.

A few days later, we learned that the 6-week ban was blocked, but the 20-week ban remained in place. I was still devastated, but at least I knew what my timeline was. I immediately called my high risk ob-gyn and asked how early I could schedule my genetic testing and 20-week anatomy ultrasound. My hospital and insurance company wouldn't allow me to complete the anatomy ultrasound before 19 weeks and I knew that wasn't enough time. What if I wanted a second opinion? What if I needed some time to think? What if the fetus wasn't cooperating and they couldn't get a clear shot of the heart, lungs, and brain that day? They were sorry, but there was nothing they could do. The test just wasn't as reliable before 19 weeks.

My only option was noninvasive prenatal genetic testing. A seemingly simple blood test that identifies fetal chromosomes and screens – it doesn't diagnose, it just screens – for genetic problems. I could have the testing done as early as 9 weeks. The catch? My insurance policy wouldn't cover the \$10,000 fee. They preferred that women wait for their 20-week anatomy scan. I tried to explain why I needed to know if something was wrong before then, but my insurance company basically told me it wasn't their problem.

We decided to do the testing – again, something I was "unbelievably lucky" to be able to afford, but something I shouldn't have had to do in the first place. The results came back three weeks later with good news. We were having a boy, and the lab didn't detect any chromosomal abnormalities. I breathed a small sigh of relief and started counting down the days until my

anatomy ultrasound.

I was nervous walking into the hospital that morning. I tried to prepare by reading about conditions that are commonly diagnosed during these scans so I could-maybe-feel confident about making a very quick decision to terminate the pregnancy if they found something. Ideally, I would have planned to meet with specialists and genetic counselors before making a decision that monumental, but thanks to Ohio's 20-week abortion ban, combined with a mandatory 24-hour waiting period after signing consent paperwork, I didn't have time to consult doctors. If I needed to have an abortion, I would need to schedule it that day. I would just have to guess and hope that I made the right decision. I tried not to think about how I would feel afterwards. Would I spend the rest of my life second guessing that quick decision? Who knows.

The scan was fine. My baby looked perfect, with a heart, two kidneys, two lungs, a spine and two enormous feet. As I was driving home, I felt some of the tension and stress I'd had for the last 5 months start to leave my body, but it was quickly replaced by anger. This should have been the happiest time of my life! Instead of glowing and nesting and all of the things expectant parents do to prepare for babies, I'd spent half of my pregnancy worrying about how I would protect my child from harm due to Ohio's restrictive abortion laws.

About a month later, I found myself facing yet another legal barrier to healthcare. I felt funny one afternoon so I checked my blood pressure. It was 180/98. I called my doctor who told me to go to the hospital immediately. It was still dangerously high 30 minutes later while I was being strapped to fetal monitors, heart rate monitors, and having a bunch of blood drawn. After a couple of hours of rest and fluids, my blood pressure was low enough to go home, but I got a stern lecture from an OB about the dangers and warning signs of preeclampsia and gestational hypertension – conditions that happen quickly and can be fatal for pregnant women if they aren't treated immediately. I promised to stay hydrated and check my blood pressure every day at home.

While we were pulling out of the hospital parking garage to go home, I told my husband how scary that felt. He grabbed my hand and said, "this is one of the best hospitals in the country. They aren't going to let anything happen to you." I just smiled and squeezed his hand, but deep down, I knew that wasn't entirely true. Anti-abortion laws like SB-145 might prevent even the best doctors in the world from taking action to save my life.

Thank you for time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.