

Hello, Chairman Merrin, Ranking Minority Member Boyd, and members of the House Health Committee:

My name is Laura Slea. 1998 was a bad year for me. Three days before my 19th birthday I found out I was epileptic. 3 months after that, my now-husband was homeless, sometimes only eating when he was at the restaurant job my Mother gave him out of mercy. A month after that, my Aunt died, throwing my family into absolute chaos.

It was at about this time that I was at a Neurologist's appointment. This was one of several appointments I had as we tried to discern the cause for my seizure disorder. At the end of the appointment, she mentioned that my seizure medication contraindicated my birth control. This was before the days of the internet, when such interactions could be looked up instantaneously. I remember a shroud of dread falling over me as I left the hospital in Cleveland.

I will always remember the words from the Neurologist that day, "You will not be able to have a healthy child, ever, while you are on these medications. If the baby came to term, it would have severe birth defects. Your chances of having a normal child are nil."

Two weeks later, I was consumed in that dread when I found out I was pregnant. As a lifelong feminist, I had more insight than some women my age had to my menstrual cycle and what any anomalies could mean.

"You caught it early," my gynecologist said. "You are 4-6 weeks along. *Most women wouldn't know they were pregnant at this point.*"

19 years old, depressed, facing a lifetime of seizures and tests and medications. My family falling apart as I watched. A would-be baby's father sleeping on different couches and floors every night as he scrambled to get his life together at age 20, with no parental support.

And a lifetime of caring for an infant like my cousin Jacob had been, never speaking or interacting, fully paralyzed, and never to reach adulthood. Jacob died before he was 17. I knew what awaited me. This is what my life was to be if I had no access to safe abortion.

I was in no position to raise a child born with without brain function, both feet, and eyes that could see. How would I raise a child doomed to a life of suffering?

When I called my staunchly Catholic mother at work to tell her the news, I already had the answer to the first thing she asked me.

"You're not going to keep this baby, are you?"

"No, ma."

I told my then-fiance and reminded him of the doctor's words.

I told him I could not and would not keep this child.

"I support whatever decision you make," he replied.

Within two weeks I was laying on a hospital bed, anesthesia taking me away. I shall never forget that morning. There was a radio in the room, and, I heard "Refugee" by Tom Petty playing as I looked up into my fiancé's eyes. He held my hand and then I fell asleep.

Less than one hour from that surreal exchange, I awoke, sore and groggy and relieved. Dave was there with a gentle smile, smoothing my hair as he had months earlier when I collapsed into a generalized seizure in an Eastlake restaurant.

Life was very hard that year, but that trial was over. The rest of my life was not to be full of the struggle some brave people do face.

Dave and I were married four years later. Our lives are productive. We have moved to rural Dayton to support my parents as they grow older. We are homeowners. After many discussions we decided that having children was not for us. We are grateful that until recent times that decision was wholly up to me, and without political interference. 21 years later, our lives as we know them would not be possible when one factors in the constant care my child would have needed. It is difficult to obtain this high level of care in any place around the world, even more so in rural Clinton County where we now live. Because I was able to discern what was right for me, my parents will not end up in nursing homes.

Dave and I are grateful that we live in a country where the bodily autonomy of a citizen has been written into the Constitution, but saddened to watch women's rights be chipped away by people eager to impose their morals on women such as myself.

I am honored and appreciative that I have had a chance to tell you, my state's elected legislators, first hand why abortion must be kept safe, legal, and accessible.

Please remember the story of a young woman who had too much to bear- Thankfully I live in a country where my life and my choice and my ability to receive safe care are up to me.

I sleep soundly at night when I think about those times. I did what was right.

Thank you for hearing my story.