

Testimony in Support of Bill 23-434, “Strengthening Reproductive Health Protections Amendment Act of 2019”

Public Hearing: Committee on Government Operations

December 19, 2019

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Thank you to Chairman Todd and members of the Committee for allowing me to speak before you today. My name is Rebecca Barson, and I am here to support the “Strengthening Reproductive Health Protections Amendment Act of 2019.” I am proud to consider DC my adopted hometown and have spent the majority of the last 20 years here, primarily in Ward 3. I am also a small business owner and a public health professional with 20 years of expertise in women’s and reproductive health policy and advocacy. In full disclosure, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Maryland, DC, and NoVA is one of my consulting clients.

My vision of DC is one where everyone is able to live a safe and healthy life and has access to the full range of health care they need to make that a reality – including being able to decide when and whether to become a parent, one of the most important decisions any of us make in life. I have watched in dismay and horror over the last several years as more and more states have put ever more onerous restrictions on abortion and other reproductive health care and made it increasingly difficult to access, with people of color, low-income people, and young people facing the greatest barriers. We are now facing an even greater threat as the Trump-Pence Administration continues to attack access to care and has made it clear that they want to outlaw abortion. And with the *June Medical Services vs. Gee* case pending at the Supreme Court, it is not an exaggeration to say that abortion access hangs in the balance.

We in DC are uniquely vulnerable because we lack statehood and home rule and are subject to the whims of Congress. We need to act now to protect access to abortion and reproductive health care here in DC. The Strengthening Reproductive Health Protections Amendment Act of 2019 will codify access to safe, legal abortion no matter what happens to *Roe vs. Wade*. It will also recognize and protect the right of every individual to access reproductive health care without government interference and will ensure that no one can be punished for seeking to end a pregnancy. In addition, it will protect reproductive health care professionals from employment discrimination.

These protections are important both philosophically – those of us who live here will know that our rights and decision-making are acknowledged and respected – but also practically. Forcing someone to carry a pregnancy to term that they don’t want can have both dire health and economic consequences, with the harm falling most heavily on those who already experience financial and other challenges accessing health care.

As I mentioned in my opening, I have chosen to both live and start a business here in DC – one of the considerations in that decision was DC’s long history of strong human rights protections. Given what I have seen happening across the country over the last several years, it feels particularly important to also live in a place that will proactively acknowledge and protect reproductive rights. I hope DC will make the commitment to secure a future that safeguards abortion and respects personal decision-making by passing the Strengthening Reproductive Health Protections Amendment Act of 2019.

I am grateful to the Committee for taking on this important issue, and I urge you to move this bill forward as quickly as possible, given the timing of the Supreme Court case this term. Thank you for your time today, and I am happy to answer any questions.