



Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

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**Testimony of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
in support of S.J. 35 Resolution Proposing a State Constitutional Amendment
Concerning Discrimination on the Basis of Sex Under the Equal Protection Clause
February 7, 2025**

Senator Flexer, Representative Blumenthal, and honorable members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Chief Policy and Advocacy at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE) testifying in support of S.J. 35 *Resolution Proposing a State Constitutional Amendment Concerning Discrimination on the Basis of Sex Under the Equal Protection Clause*. As the state's largest provider of sexual and reproductive health care to almost 50,000 patients last year at 14 health centers across the state, Planned Parenthood believes all people should have access to quality, affordable, and compassionate health care as a basic human right — regardless of who you are, where you live, your income, if you have health insurance or your immigration status.

We thank the committee for raising this important issue at this critical moment in our country. Our basic health care and rights are on the line. Lawmakers hostile to reproductive health and rights want to escalate restrictions on abortion access, birth control, transgender health care, IVF and shut down health centers, including Planned Parenthood.

In no uncertain terms, access to abortion was devastated by the overturning of *Roe v Wade*. The impact of bans on abortion cannot be understated. As of December 2024, abortion bans are in effect in 20 states, leaving 27 million women of reproductive age, plus trans and nonbinary people, without access to abortion in their home states. People are dying because of abortion bans — we know their names, Amber Nicole Thurman, Candi Miller, Josseli Barnica, to name a few, we know their stories, and we know they are just the first. They should still be here. Far too many patients have been left without access to health care because of their zip code, even in emergency circumstances that require life-saving abortion care. Every day we live under these abortion bans, more people will suffer and die.

It is not a coincidence that many of the same states with abortion bans have the highest maternal mortality rates, particularly for Black women. U.S. maternal health is poor, and even worse when it comes to Black maternal health. Racial disparities in sexual and reproductive health care contribute to disparities in maternal health. We know that bans on abortion care and attacks on reproductive health care continue to disproportionately affect Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities, people with low incomes, immigrants, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, and people living in rural communities.

Just as we are seeing states ban abortion care, state bans on transgender health care passed at an alarming rate in 2024, and now 26 states ban access to gender-affirming care.¹ These attacks on LGBTQ+ people and their rights along with concerns raised in *Dobbs* decision suggests that further erosion of people's rights are likely which is why we must do everything we can to enshrine these protections for LGBTQ+ people and families in our state.

Restricting access to sexual and reproductive health and transgender health care has always been about power and control. These health care bans and what's happening in our country are meant to cause chaos and confusion— the cruelty is the point.

Here is the truth about abortion: abortion care is health care, abortion is normal, and abortion is one of the safest medical procedures with a safety record of over 99%. Nearly one in four women in America will have an abortion by age 45. Every day, people across our state and the country make deeply personal decisions about their pregnancies. Those decisions should be respected and valued, regardless of the outcome of their

pregnancy decision and should be free from shame, stigma, and political interference. Transgender health care is health care. At Planned Parenthood, we believe all people should be able to get the health care and education they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives. This includes providing supportive, gender-affirming care to people who need it.

Connecticut is a leader state with a long and proud history of strong bipartisan support for advancing reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ rights. Planned Parenthood unequivocally supports protecting the right to reproductive health care, including abortion care, and transgender health care in Connecticut and believes our constitution and our laws are meant to protect peoples' basic rights which includes living freely and protected against discrimination based on who you are. The right to control our own bodies is a human right. There is no compromising on people's ability to control their own bodies and personal decisions. At no point is a politician or a judge more qualified to make decisions about your health than you and your health care providers.

Connecticut's Equal Rights Amendment's protections are stronger than the federal Constitution by its explicit inclusion of prohibiting discrimination based on "sex. There is also a strong argument that Connecticut statutes, which provide a high level of protections for abortion rights, rests on a constitutional foundation and the Connecticut Constitution's due process, privacy, and equal protection guarantees are stronger than their federal equivalents.ⁱⁱ Thanks to the dedicated leadership of our elected champions, abortion has been protected in Connecticut statute since 1990.

Those protections have been expanded and strengthened in the last three years thanks to the unwavering leadership of the Lamont Administration and Connecticut General Assembly who took bold action by passing the Reproductive Freedom Defense Act ([Public Act 22-19](#)) modernizing Connecticut's abortion law and protecting patients and providers from abortion bans passed by politicians in other states and other legislation reflects the will of the vast majority of Connecticut voters who support reproductive freedom. As Connecticut continues to lead the fight for reproductive freedom by expanding access to abortion and contraceptive care to people in our state with bipartisan support, these policies are more critical than ever.

Connecticut also has a long and bipartisan history as a leader in advancing LGBTQ+ rights in state statute from barring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression to marriage equality in the Connecticut Supreme Court *Kerrigan v. Department of Public Health* and codifying it in state statute.

Despite the progress we have made in Connecticut many people in our state still face barriers to accessing abortion care, gender-affirming care, and other essential reproductive health care due to systemic barriers such as racism, economic inequality, immigration status, transphobia, the rising costs of health care, and abortion stigma. In this year's legislative session, we are working on a number of policy priorities to protect and expand access to reproductive health care and protect providers delivering those services and patients who need it.

Planned Parenthood will continue to fight for policies that protect the rights of all people to ensure our patients and communities have what they need to live healthy and self-determined lives. No one's health should be compromised, or health care access denied, because of who they are or where they live. We support S.J. 35 as it would build upon our state constitution's equal protection clause to clearly prohibit discrimination based on decisions surrounding pregnancy, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Connecticut must continue to lead and do everything we can to protect and expand access to reproductive health care for the people who need it and further protect the rights of LGBTQ+ people and families in our state. Thank you for your time and consideration of S.J. 35.

ⁱ Movement Advancement Project, Equality Maps: Bans on Best Practice Medical Care for Transgender Youth, https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/healthcare_youth_medical_care_bans

ⁱⁱ https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/AG/Press_Releases/2022/SG-Post-Dobbs-Memo-101122.pdf