



Matthew Blinstrubas, Executive Director
Equality Connecticut

Testimony in Support of S.B. 295, An Act Concerning State Law Protections for Health Care Providers and Patients Related to the Provision of a Legally Protected Health Care Activity

Dear Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Matthew Blinstrubas, and I serve as Executive Director of Equality Connecticut, an organization dedicated to advancing the rights, health, history, and well-being of LGBTQ+ people across our state. On behalf of Equality Connecticut and the communities we serve, I am writing in strong support of S.B. 295.

Everyone should be able to make decisions about their health and their lives without unnecessary government interference. S.B. 295 would strengthen Connecticut's existing shield law and provide an additional layer of protection for healthcare providers who offer legally protected and medically necessary care, regardless of a patient's zip code. At a time when politicians in other states are increasingly attempting to criminalize essential health care, Connecticut has both the opportunity and the responsibility to ensure that providers in our state can continue to care for patients safely, ethically, and without fear of out-of-state retaliation.

This legislation is particularly important as access to abortion and medically necessary gender-affirming care continues to face coordinated attacks nationwide. Connecticut has long been a leader in protecting bodily autonomy and access to care. S.B. 295 would build on that legacy by ensuring that providers can continue offering care—including abortion and medically necessary treatment for transgender young people—through telehealth services to patients who may not be able to safely access that care in their home states.

Telehealth has become an essential part of modern health care delivery. It allows patients and providers to connect through video visits, secure messaging, and remote monitoring, expanding access to care that might otherwise be out of reach. Through telehealth, licensed providers can deliver reproductive health care and gender-affirming care virtually, enabling patients to receive the same safe and effective care from home or wherever it is most accessible for them. Research shows that telehealth for medication abortion reduces logistical barriers and is widely supported by patients. For

individuals who cannot travel due to cost, work obligations, childcare responsibilities, or other barriers, telehealth can be the difference between accessing care and going without it.

Providers deserve better than political interference, medically unnecessary barriers, or the threat of criminalization for doing their jobs. Patients and their families do not want politicians or judges dictating deeply personal medical decisions. No out-of-state lawmaker should have the authority to determine what care Connecticut providers can offer or to attempt to punish providers for following Connecticut law and medical standards of care.

It is important for the Committee to recognize that much of the opposition to bills like S.B. 295 is not organic to Connecticut. In recent years, national organizations and coordinated advocacy networks have increasingly sent representatives from outside our state to testify in hearings or submit written testimony aimed at influencing Connecticut law. These efforts are part of a broader national strategy to roll back access to reproductive health care and gender-affirming care state by state. While everyone has the right to participate in the democratic process, Connecticut lawmakers should be clear-eyed about the fact that many of these campaigns are driven by out-of-state political agendas rather than the needs or values of Connecticut residents.

We are also seeing a small number of individuals testify who claim affiliation with the LGBTQ+ community while advocating for policies that would restrict health care access and legal protections for transgender people. It is important to be clear that the LGBTQ+ community, like any community, is not a monolith. People within our community hold a range of perspectives. However, Equality Connecticut exists to advance the rights, health, history, and well-being of LGBTQ+ people across our state. Policies that restrict medically necessary care for transgender people or undermine bodily autonomy run counter to that mission and to the broad consensus of LGBTQ+ organizations, medical professionals, and public health experts who support evidence-based care.

Connecticut has already demonstrated national leadership in this area. In 2022, following the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, Connecticut enacted the Reproductive Freedom Defense Act—the first shield law in the nation—designed to protect providers from hostile enforcement efforts by anti-abortion states. Lawmakers also expanded these protections to include gender-affirming care in response to escalating attempts by other states to criminalize care for transgender youth.

S.B. 295 represents the next step in fulfilling that promise. By explicitly protecting telehealth services, Connecticut would align itself with the most comprehensive shield

laws in the country. Eight states—including California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington—have already adopted similar interstate telehealth protections. These policies recognize the growing role of telemedicine in expanding access to care and the need to protect providers who responsibly use these tools.

The need for such protections has only grown in recent years. Since the fall of federal constitutional protections for abortion, more than 19 states have enacted severe restrictions or total bans on abortion care. At the same time, over half of all U.S. abortions are now medication abortions, which are safe, effective, and often delivered through telehealth. Studies consistently show that telehealth models for medication abortion are as safe and effective as in-person care, with nearly 98 percent of patients experiencing complete abortions without additional medical intervention and extremely low rates of adverse events.

For many patients—particularly those living in states where abortion is banned—telehealth may be the only realistic option for accessing care. Traveling across state lines requires time, money, and logistical resources that many people simply do not have. The same barriers affect families seeking medically necessary care for transgender young people. When states criminalize or restrict that care, families are forced to search for safe alternatives elsewhere.

Unfortunately, we are already seeing aggressive attempts by some states to reach beyond their borders to target providers in states where care remains legal. Recent civil and criminal cases against providers in states such as New York and California illustrate the escalating legal risks health care professionals face simply for practicing medicine in accordance with their state's laws. These efforts are designed to create fear, chill access to care, and undermine the ability of providers to serve patients.

Connecticut must ensure that its laws are strong enough to withstand this new era of legal intimidation. Strengthening shield law protections for telehealth providers will help safeguard patient privacy, protect providers from out-of-state prosecution, and ensure continued access to essential health care.

At its core, this issue is about freedom and dignity. Everyone should be able to make decisions about their bodies, their health, and their futures without political interference. Someone's ability to receive medically necessary care should not depend on where they live or whether their state government has chosen to criminalize evidence-based medicine.

As the first state in the nation to adopt a shield law, Connecticut made a clear commitment to protecting both patients and providers from out-of-state overreach. S.B. 295 would honor that commitment by strengthening those protections and ensuring that Connecticut remains a safe place for compassionate, evidence-based health care.

For these reasons, Equality Connecticut respectfully urges the Committee to support S.B. 295.

Thank you for your time and consideration.