

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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Opening Statement Acting Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney

Hearing on “Examining State Efforts to Undermine Access to Reproductive Health Care” November 14, 2019

I would like to begin by acknowledging that this is the first full Committee hearing we have held since our friend, our colleague, and our beloved Chairman, Elijah Cummings, passed away. Chairman Cummings spent his life fighting for justice and equality for everyone, and he was a fierce champion for women’s access to health care.

Across the country, extreme forces in some state governments are taking draconian steps to violate women’s rights by restricting access to reproductive health services—including abortion.

These state actions include prerequisite undue burdens, restrictions, and outrageously invasive procedures for patients seeking abortions.

Let me be clear about what these restrictions are: they are a denial of basic healthcare services that women have a right to receive—no matter where they live.

I want to thank my good friend, Congressman Clay, for his leadership in requesting today’s hearing.

Missouri has taken some of the most extreme actions to limit access to reproductive health care. Missouri is one of six states with only one remaining abortion provider. And as we will hear today, it is at risk of having no providers at all.

Missouri’s one remaining clinic is Planned Parenthood, and we thank that clinic’s director, Dr. McNicholas, for testifying here today and for her brave service to the women in her community every single day.

Earlier this year, Dr. Randall Williams, the director of the Missouri state health department, ordered Planned Parenthood to perform medically unnecessary pelvic examinations on every single woman seeking an abortion.

This was an invasive state-sponsored abuse of women seeking care. After significant public backlash, the state suspended this cruel practice.

But Dr. Williams also recently was forced to admit that he directed state employees to collect information about patients' menstrual cycles to advance his ideological crusade. That is what they were spending taxpayer dollars on.

I cannot begin to describe my disgust at these violations of privacy and breaches of trust by government officials.

Sadly, Missouri's actions are not taking place in isolation. Other states have push for similar restrictions.

I believe these states have been emboldened by the Trump Administration's systemic attacks on reproductive health care and general disrespect for women.

In 2012, our former Chairman, Darrell Issa, held a hearing in this Committee room with an all-male panel of religious leaders who were trying to take away contraceptive coverage for women. They did not invite a single woman to testify on that panel. Then, they refused our requests to have Sandra Fluke, who was a Georgetown Law School student at the time, testify about the importance of health insurance coverage of contraceptives. They said she was "not qualified." It was at that hearing that I asked in protest, "Where are the women?"

It is time to let women speak, and it is time for everyone to listen. It is time for the elected representatives here in Congress and in state houses across the country to *protect* the right to privacy and a woman's right to abortion services rather than attack it, undermine it, and try to eliminate it.

I want to thank Jennifer Box for sharing her family's story with us. No one should ever have to make the heartbreaking decision that you and your husband had to make. But it is your decision. It does not belong to anyone else.

I also want to thank Marcela Howell from In Our Own Voice, which is part of the National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda, and Fatima Goss Graves from the National Women's Law Center for helping the Committee on this subject today.

I now recognize the Ranking Member Jordan for his opening statement.

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