

**House Committee on Oversight and Reform Hearing- A State of Crisis:  
Examining the Urgent Need to Protect and Expand Abortion Rights and Access**

**September 30, 2021**

**Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal (WA-07)**

**PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

Chairwoman Maloney and Ranking Member Comer, thank you for inviting me to speak today.

I speak to you as one of the one in four women in America who have had an abortion. For you to understand how I ultimately decided to have an abortion, I have to start earlier with the birth of my first child, Janak.

Janak was born at 26.5 weeks while I was on a 2-year fellowship in India. They weighed only 1 pound 14 ounces and upon birth went down to a weight of just 21 ounces. Janak was so small, they fit into the palm of my hand, no bigger than a medium-size squash. For three months, we did not know if Janak would live or die. They needed multiple blood transfusions, had to be fed drop by drop, and constantly had their heart stop and re-start.

We returned to the United States after three months. In those early, intensely difficult years, Janak had hydroencephalitis (water in the brain), seizures and repeatedly returned to the emergency room because of life-threatening pneumonia. The fact that Janak is a 25-year old beautiful human being is a true miracle and the greatest gift in my life.

At the same time that Janak was born, I was also fighting to keep my legal permanent resident status, married to a US citizen with a US citizen child now. In the end, I was able to return to the United States with Janak, provided that I started from scratch to qualify for citizenship.

As a new mom taking care of a very sick baby and recovering from major surgery myself, I was struggling. I experienced severe postpartum depression and post-traumatic stress disorder that was only diagnosed after I contemplated suicide and realized I needed to seek help. My marriage did not survive, we split custody of Janak, and I was a part-time single parent.

Shortly after, I met a wonderful man who is my husband today. I knew I was not ready to have another child so I religiously took my daily contraceptive pill. Despite that, I became pregnant. I consulted with my doctors who told me that any future pregnancy would likely also be high-risk to me and the child, similar to what I had gone through with Janak. I very much wanted to have more children, but I simply could not imagine going through that again.

After discussions with my partner, who was completely supportive of whatever choice I made, I decided to have an abortion. Two decades later I think about those moments on the table in the doctor's office, a doctor who was kind and compassionate and skilled, performing abortions in a state that recognizes a person's constitutional right to make their choices about their reproductive care.

For me, terminating my pregnancy was not an easy choice, but it was *my* choice. And that is what must be preserved, for every pregnant person.

Until 2019, I never spoke publicly or privately about my abortion. In fact, I did not even tell my mother about it. Some of it was because as an immigrant from a culture that deeply values children and in a society that still stigmatizes abortion, suicide and mental health needs, I felt shame that I should never have felt.

Two years ago, I decided to tell my story as a member of Congress because I was so deeply concerned about the abortion ban legislation that was coming out from states across the country. Today, I am testifying before you because I want you to know that there are so many different situations that people face in making these choices. Whether the choice to have an abortion is easy or hard, whether there are traumatic situations or not, none of that should be the issue—it is simply nobody's business what choices we as pregnant people make about our own bodies. Let me be clear, I would never tell people who don't choose to have an abortion that they should; nor should they tell me that I shouldn't. This is a constitutionally protected, intensely personal choice.

I did not suffer the economic issues that so many poor people suffer. I did not suffer from living in a state that does not allow pregnant people to make these choices and, unlike one of my colleagues today, I had the privilege of experiencing the world in a post *Roe v. Wade* time where abortion was established as a constitutional right.

Because of the cruel Texas abortion ban and the other state abortion bans currently being litigated by those unaffected by the outcome, many people may not have the same choice as I did. That is unacceptable. Abortion bans are not a just political issue, they do real harm to people across the country and in our most vulnerable communities.

I am proud today to be testifying alongside fellow women of color members of Congress about the need to protect our right to control our bodies. It's time to make the Women's Health Protection Act law, repeal the Hyde Amendment, and remove the stigma around abortion care and reproductive health choices.