



Planned Parenthood of Northern New England Testimony on H.89, “An act relating to civil and criminal procedures concerning legally protected health care activity,” House Committee on Judiciary. January 26, 2023.

Thank you for having me here today. My name is Lucy Leriche and I’m the Vice President of Vermont Public Affairs at Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, or PPNNE.

I want to express my gratitude to my Representative and lead sponsor of this bill, Representative Donnally, and to its many co-sponsors, and to this committee for taking up bill H.89, and for your leadership in doing all that you can to protect patients and health care providers in accessing and providing care in Vermont.

PPNNE is the largest reproductive health care and sexuality education provider and advocate in northern New England with health centers in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine.

There are seven PPNNE health centers in Vermont, and last year we served 16,000 patients in our state.

Our services include:

Abortion services; birth control; cervical, breast, colorectal, and other cancer screenings; erectile dysfunction treatment; follow up services for abnormal Pap tests and HPV; initial infertility work-up; miscarriage care; trans-inclusive health care, including gender affirming hormone therapy; STD testing and treatment, and prevention services; and well-person checkups, and more.

Since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* last June, bans have eliminated access to all or some abortions in 18 states. More states could implement abortion bans this year. The consequences of these bans have been devastating for both patients and providers:

- And the effects of these bans are not limited to states where abortion is no longer legal. In Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire, where abortion is protected, we have seen patients traveling long distances to access care.
- The harmful effects of abortion bans stretch beyond abortion care. It’s now harder for people to get lifesaving medical care for miscarriages, ectopic pregnancies, and other pregnancy-related complications.
- Providers and medical staff in states with harsh consequences for people who perform or assist in abortions are [afraid to treat patients](#) — even in emergency situations. This puts the health and lives of pregnant people at risk, as providers are forced to delay urgently needed procedures until people are dangerously sick, so they can legally

provide care that meets the definition of “lifesaving” to ensure compliance with restrictive laws.

- We also know that anti-abortion rights lawmakers won't stop at banning abortion — they're working toward a broader agenda to roll back our rights and freedoms, from access to affordable birth control and to LGBTQ+ health care and more.

I'm here today to express PPNNE's appreciation and support for this bill that aims to protect providers and patients, regardless of the patient's location, from legal repercussions for offering and receiving essential and sometimes lifesaving health care, including reproductive health care services and gender-affirming health care services, both of which Planned Parenthood provides.

This comprehensive bill aims to create protections through a number of provisions that include:

Limitations on arrests, testimony, extradition, summonses, a judgements provision, privacy protections, and a countersuit provision, and access to health care facilities.

We deeply appreciate the inclusion of gender affirming care in H.89. Across the US, there are continued attacks on transgender rights and gender-affirming care.

In 2021 alone, state legislatures across the country introduced more than 100 bills to restrict trans rights, with close to 60 of these bills amounting to health care bans for trans youth. This trend continued into 2022, with more than 150 anti-trans bills introduced, about a third of which would limit or entirely ban minors' access to gender affirming care.

Providers and patients in Vermont should be able to continue to navigate a health care system without harassment or fear.

Last November, Vermont voters overwhelmingly passed the Reproductive Liberty Amendment, which now protects reproductive rights in our state constitution.

Vermont voters stood up for reproductive freedom, for ourselves, our neighbors, and future generations. And every Vermont town gave majority support to the Reproductive Liberty Amendment.

The amendment protects the rights of every Vermonter, no matter their gender or identity, race, where they live, or how much money they have.

H.89 is a natural expression of the values asserted by Vermonters in November about protecting the dignity to live your life and be who you are without government interference. It's also about protecting health care providers who deliver compassionate care every day.

This bill aims to mitigate the risk of out-of-state enforcement against reproductive health care providers in our state who provide care, including abortion and gender-affirming care, to patients from our state and elsewhere.

We also know this is a new and untested legal landscape. So as not to create a false sense of security, we will continue to advise our health care providers to seek legal counsel to ensure they fully understand their specific risks.

Given the hostile environment nationally, it is critical that our state take every available opportunity to protect access to this care for those in our state, and for our neighbors forced to travel away from home to get necessary, time-sensitive care. This bill is an important step to ensuring that abortion and gender-affirming care remains accessible in Vermont.

We are proud to live in a state where our elected leaders are eager and determined to ensure that people can safely access abortion and gender-affirming care, and that providers can continue offering this critical care with protections from legal harassment. We hope to continue working with you to increase access to care this legislative session and in the years to come.

Thank you.