

Hello, my name is Kate Bailey. I am a resident of South Burlington, and I work at the Office of the Health Care Advocate at Vermont Legal Aid. I come here tonight to speak from my own experience and to ask you to support H.57.

This bill moves us from the status quo of passive reproductive rights to a proactive step towards reproductive justice. The organization SisterSong defines reproductive justice as the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in a safe, sustainable community.

Abortion rights are about so much more than terminating a pregnancy. Last year, my dear friend gave birth to a beautiful baby boy at UVM Medical Center. A week later, she hemorrhaged and needed emergency surgery to stop the bleeding. The procedure to save her life after childbirth was called dilation and evacuation—a common procedure also used for surgical abortion. Similarly, now in my thirties, I have friends who have miscarried planned pregnancies. The treatment after their miscarriages was a prescription for misoprostol—a drug that is also prescribed in medication abortion. Both examples here illustrate that much of what goes into terminating a pregnancy is common in maternal health care. It's health care. There is nothing particularly special or scary about abortion as a medical procedure. What *is* scary, and harmful, is the stigmatized rhetoric and regulations that make abortion expensive, inaccessible, and at worst, criminal for folks seeking this care.

H 57 adds important protections to statutes which already acknowledge the terrible consequences of state-sanctioned reproductive injustices of our past. We have a dark history in Vermont of eugenics. Members of our indigenous Abenaki community, immigrants of French Canadian descent, and disabled young people were forcibly sterilized well into the 20th century. It is shameful that our state and our country has denied whole communities the right to bodily autonomy. It is no more right to forced pregnancy than to forced sterilization. *Roe v Wade* and our state's own Supreme Court decision was a response to women being denied their rights and suffering dangerous consequences. Let's not wait to respond retroactively to injustice again.

Now, It is true that there will still be “plenty” of women who will be able access abortion if H 57 does not pass. The *real* truth is that those folks with access are almost certainly going to be white, cisgender, wealthier, have more education, and live closer to major hospitals. They will generally have more privilege than those who already face inequalities in reproductive health care—and in just plain health care—in our current system.

In my day job as a health care advocate, I hear from Vermonters who struggle to access health care across the state. There are already too many barriers for Vermonters who are rural, who are poor, who are people of color, people with disabilities, people who are trans or queer or have chronic and pre-existing conditions. These barriers already prevent Vermonters from getting the health care they need.

I urge you: Do not to wait for things to get worse here in Vermont. Do not wait for abortion laws to become more restrictive nationwide. We have the responsibility to ensure folks have as much access to abortion as anything else in our dysfunctional health care system. We have the responsibility to ensure self-determination and the right to choose how, when, and if to have children. Now is exactly the right time to pass this law. Thank you.