

Dear committee members and legislators,

I would like to share my concerns about Bill H.57. Many legislators defend this bill by insisting that the lack of restrictions on abortions is working to reduce 3rd trimester abortions- as if 1st and 2nd trimester abortions are perfectly fine. I would argue that they are not, and I would like to share my personal story to help make that point.

I became pregnant the last week of my junior year of high school. Terrified and ashamed, I went to Planned Parenthood for help. Later that summer I received one of those "easy" and unrestricted Vermont abortions. At 17 years old, I didn't have to get my parents involved...it was all paid for by VT Medicaid...and the required "counseling" consisted of two questions: why do you want an abortion? And are you sure you want an abortion? My answer to why I wanted an abortion? I had college plans and was going to be captain of the field hockey team. My answer to if I was sure I wanted one..."I don't have any choice." Of course, I did have other options, but the counselor didn't offer any of them to me. She simply signed off that my counseling had been done.

At 13 weeks pregnant I went to have an abortion thinking it was going to take care of this problem I had gotten myself into. I thought it was a clump of cells, as was commonly thought at the time. I thought it would be over that day and I would go on with my life. But that is not what an abortion does. For years I couldn't even let myself think about it. I stuffed it way down and pretended it never happened. I ignored it until I couldn't anymore...when I saw the early ultrasound of one of my children. At 9 weeks pregnant with one of my daughters I saw "what" was inside of me, and to my horror, it was a baby. At just 9 weeks along I saw all of the beautiful parts of her little body, and saw her amazing little heart beating. I couldn't understand how a baby 4 weeks older than this one could have been torn apart and suctioned from my body. I can't begin to tell you what it is like to be a mother and know you have allowed this to happen to your child. And while I alone made that choice, I am not the only one responsible for that decision. The lawmakers in Vermont allowed me as an unformed 17 year old to make the worst mistake of my life. A devastating and permanent mistake.

Today I am Mom to 6 wonderful children. If I asked myself now "which child would I give up to be field hockey captain?" or "which of my babies would I not have to finish college without the inconveniences of a baby?" ... maybe my oldest Abby, or one of her sisters- Elly, or Lucy, or Genevieve. Or maybe one the boys, Lincoln or Levi? It's ridiculous to even ask! No mother would give up one of her children for such superficial reasons. Except, I did. And so many young women do this all the time, not really knowing what they are doing. Vermont laws are not protecting our young people, but failing them. These laws need to be changed, not codified.

And while I'm sure you have been hearing plenty of why 3rd trimester abortions should not be allowed without restrictions, I will add my voice to this also-

One of my precious little ones came 6 weeks early. At 34 weeks, she was perfect, just tiny (4 lbs. 12 Oz.). She didn't need help breathing, or eating. She was just a perfect little girl...a human...a person. Will you really say she has no rights? Will you really allow a possibly distraught mother and an abortion provider who will financially benefit from the abortion (not a medical doctor) to decide if that little person gets to live or die? As committee members and legislators, you hold a lot of responsibility. Please listen to the people of Vermont. Even if many are pro-choice (I believe 59%), very few (11%) agree with unrestricted abortions up until birth.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Bliss