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Good afternoon my name is Melinda Moulton, I am the CEO of Main Street Landing, I serve on the Board of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, and I am the President of the Planned Parenthood Vermont Action Fund. I am honored to have this opportunity to share with you my story and express my passionate belief that women deserve the human right to determine their own reproductive futures.

Let's return back in time 50 years ago. How many of you around this table remember what it was like 50 years ago when women did not have a legal right to choose their reproductive fate? I am 68 years old and 50 years ago I was 18. Let me share with those of you who do not remember a time when abortion was legal and remind those of us who do. As a Junior in High School, my best friend, Judy became pregnant. Her boyfriend was in our class. We did not have sex education or access to contraception in those days, but our desire for sexual exploration was as great then as it is today for 17 year old girls.

When the school found out about Judy's pregnancy they expelled her. She was a top student, President of our Student Council, Captain of our Cheerleading Squad, and my Co-Captain of our Basketball team. She had a fabulous future ahead of her.

But, the school expelled her. Her boyfriend remained in school. She had the baby and it was given away. Judy's life was changed forever.

Let me tell you about my mother: she had 4 children, three miscarriages, two pregnancies that went to term, but the babies died at birth, and a pregnancy where she gave the baby up for adoption. All in all, my mother had 10 pregnancies in her short life. She was not the only one responsible for the pregnancies, but in the society my mother lived in men tended to get a pass and women carried the full brunt of pregnancy - physically, socially, and mentally. When I was 10 years old in 1960 my father and mother divorced. Abortion was not legal. As a single woman, my mother fell in love with a man and she became pregnant. We did not learn about this until years later. What I remember is that my mother left for what she said was an operation. In fact, she was going to a Woman's hospital up on the hill in our town where women with means could go and pay to give birth in secret and then give their babies away without anyone ever knowing in order to maintain their place in society. Well something happened at the "Woman's Hospital" because my mother died 3 days before Christmas.

I learned many years later that my mother gave birth to a baby girl who was adopted. After the birth the doctor performed a hysterectomy which went wrong. My mother developed peritonitis and over a 5 month period she withered away – got pneumonia and died. I was 12 and my mother was just 40 years old. Another memory that is seared in my brain is the night my mother was rushed to the hospital because she was found bleeding on the floor of our bathroom. Years later I learned from my aunt that my mother attempted to abort a pregnancy herself. She spent two weeks in the hospital to heal.

These two women I loved and cherished. Their lives were profoundly and negatively affected because they did not have access to safe and legal abortion. As a young girl watching the horrors they endured I have committed my adult life to insuring that a woman's right to an abortion remains a woman's right to choose. In 1972 and under the Nixon Administration abortion became legal in this country. After my son was born I became pregnant and my husband and I were building a home and just starting out on our life – we chose to have an abortion because we could not support a second child. Five years later we decided to have our second child and she is 40 years old today and has given me 2 grandchildren.

What possibly could lurk in the minds of those who would want to deny a woman the right to choose their own destiny? This is why I will, until my last breath, fight for the right of all women to have access to safe and legal abortion. Unwanted Pregnancies are the lowest level they have ever been in this country because of sex education and access to affordable contraception. We should be very proud of this milestone, and I commend Planned Parenthood for leading this movement. I am here today to tell you that Vermont needs to take the lead to insure that all women for all time have access to affordable, legal, and safe abortion. Let's be honest - women WILL always choose their own reproductive destiny - and the reality is - it will either be at the dangerous end of a coat hanger or it will remain safe in the capable and trained hands of a professional. For our daughters and our granddaughters we must insure it remains the LATTER.

Thank you.