



VT Human Rights Commission
14-16 Baldwin Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-6301
<http://hrc.vermont.gov>

[phone] 802-828-2480
[fax] 802-828-2481
[tdd] 877-294-9200
[toll free] 1-800-416-2010

Bor Yang
Executive Director and Legal Counsel
Direct line: (802) 828-2493
[Bor.Yang@vermont.gov](mailto:bor.yang@vermont.gov)

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The Honorable Virginia Lyons, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
Vermont Legislature
Statehouse
Montpelier, Vermont

RE: H.57 - An Act relating to preserving the right to an abortion

Dear Chair Lyons and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for having me testify on H.57 last week in committee. This is my follow-up written testimony. As Executive Director of the Vermont Human Rights Commission (HRC), it is my honor to provide information on policies that impact Vermont's most vulnerable.

The HRC strongly supports H.57. We firmly believe that the right to have an abortion, have a child and when to start a family are fundamental human rights that transcend race, national origin and socio-economic status. Having said that, it is important to emphasize that race and socio-economic status is deeply embedded in reproductive liberty.

As we know, access to abortion already looks very different from state to state, and a person's access to timely, affordable abortion care can be profoundly impacted by her race, socioeconomic status and available resources.¹ Women of color and women of low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be impacted by funding cuts to programs and services that provide health care in their communities.² They have less fewer reproductive healthcare providers in their neighborhoods.³ Black and Hispanic women, and women of all races in low socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to have insurance coverage for contraception and family planning care. More than 50% of women of reproductive age are without publicly-funded family planning care. Only 40% of these women actually receive these services.⁴ This is why we see women of color and women of low socioeconomic status grappling with unintended pregnancies and choosing abortion at greater rates than affluent white women.

¹ Guttmacher Institute, <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2019/01/ensuring-access-abortion-state-level-selected-examples-and-lessons>

² Alisa Von Hagel and Daniela Mansbach, *Reproductive Rights in the Age of Human Rights* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

³ Id.

⁴ Disparities in Abortion Rates: A Public Health Approach, Christine Dehlendorf, MD, MAS, , Lisa H. Harris, MD, PhD, and Tracey A. Weitz, PhD, MPA

These disparities match disparities in education, income, infant mortality rates, cancer and life expectancy.⁵ In fact, unintended childbirth, as well as adverse maternal and infant health effects, are associated with decreased opportunities for education and paid employment.⁶

When women have the right to control their bodies, they have equal opportunities to meaningfully participate in society. Women of color and women in poverty already face higher levels of stress, discrimination and harassment in the workplace and poorer living and working conditions.⁷ The right to decide if and when they start a family should not also be a barrier to equal opportunity.

We are proud to be among the states preparing for the possibility that our nation will no longer have federal protections for legal abortion. There are many states with pending legislation or legal cases to block a woman's access to abortion. There are almost two dozen states that would see an almost immediate ban on abortion if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, transforming nearly half of the country into anti-choice territory in an instant. The Center for Reproductive Rights deems another 11 states "at-risk" for losing abortion rights.⁸

Currently California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Nevada, Oregon and Washington have statutes protecting the right to abortion prior to viability. New York passed a law during their current legislative session protecting the right to abortion prior to viability unless the abortion is necessary to save a woman's life. The Rhode Island and New Mexico legislatures are also currently considering a bill to protect access to abortion. Oregon's law enacted in 2017 is notable in that it prohibits the state from interfering with or restricting "the choice of a consenting individual to terminate the individual's pregnancy."⁹ This protects abortion at any time, not just pre-viability. The Oregon law is cited as the most sweeping of state efforts to entrench the right to both abortion and affordable contraception.

It is so important that states like ours that value the contributions of women in society and recognize the dignity and independence of every person, keep abortion legal.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Bor Yang
Executive Director and Legal Counsel

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id.

⁸ https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/wjbmz/trigger-laws-these-states-will-immediately-ban-abortion-if-roe-v-wade-is-repealed

⁹ <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2019/01/ensuring-access-abortion-state-level-selected-examples-and-lessons#>