

**Testimony of Cary Brown, Executive Director of the Vermont Commission on Women  
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare  
April 17, 2019**

**RE: H.57, an act relating to preserving the right to abortion**

Good morning. My name is Cary Brown and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont Commission on Women. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you today about the connection between access to reproductive health care, including abortion, and women's economic security.

*The Vermont Commission on Women affirms that every woman has a natural and unalienable right to choose whether and when to bear children; the right to educational, medical, and counseling services to make that choice wisely; and the right to the appropriate support in order to create a secure economic future based on that choice.*

The ability to decide when and whether to have a child is one of the most important factors in a woman's economic well-being over the course of her lifetime. Having control over the timing of children allows women to increase their own education, make better investments in their early work and career choices, and create better outcomes for their children. Women's access to reproductive health care, including abortion, is tied to increased labor force participation, higher earnings, more advanced careers, and better financial conditions for their children and families.

**ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTION IN GENERAL**

In the 1960s and 1970s, the introduction of oral contraceptives and repeal of laws restricting the sale of contraceptives in general, coupled with the expansion of funding for family planning programs, provided a significant increase in women's access to birth control. Looking back, it's possible to link this access years later to an increase in women's wages, their labor force participation, family incomes, and even their children's college completion rates.<sup>1</sup>

Children born after this access increased were 15% less likely to live in households receiving public assistance and 4% less likely to live with a single parent.<sup>2</sup>

This access also contributed to an increase in the number of women employed in non-traditional and professional occupations, and to higher occupational levels in general.<sup>3</sup>

Increased access to birth control can even be credited for helping to reduce the gender wage gap. One analysis showed that access to the birth control pill by younger, unmarried women in the 1960s and 1970s increased

<sup>1</sup> Martha J. Bailey, 2013. "[Fifty Years of Family Planning: New Evidence on the Long-Run Effects of Increasing Access to Contraception](#)," Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, Economic Studies Program, The Brookings Institution, vol. 46(1 (Spring), pages 341-409.

<sup>2</sup> Martha J. Bailey, Olga Malkova, and Zoe M. McLaren. Does Family Planning Increase Children's Opportunities? Evidence from the War on Poverty and the Early Years of Title X. (2014)

<sup>3</sup> Claudia Goldin & Lawrence F. Katz, The Power of the Pill: Oral Contraceptives and Women's Career and Marriage Decisions, 110 J. POL. ECON. 730, 758-62 (2002).

their hourly earnings by 8% by the time they were 50 years old.<sup>4</sup> The same analysis concluded that the Pill can account for 10% of the reduction of the gender wage gap in the 1980s and 30% in the 1990s.<sup>5</sup>

Access to birth control is linked to increases in women's wages,<sup>6</sup> in their participation in the workforce, and in their families' reliance on their earnings.<sup>7</sup> While having a child at all does create both an immediate decrease in women's earnings and a long-term decrease in their lifetime earnings,<sup>8</sup> delaying having a child can mitigate some of this loss. A delay allows time for investing in education and in early work experience, and women earn 3% more for each year they delay having children.<sup>9</sup>

Children whose mothers had access to birth control have higher family incomes, are less likely to live in poverty, and are more likely to go to college.<sup>10</sup>

### **LACK OF ACCESS TO ABORTION**

The most common reason women give for seeking an abortion is that they aren't able to afford the cost of supporting a child.<sup>11</sup>

Low-income women are particularly impacted by lack of access to abortion; they are over five times more likely to become pregnant unintentionally than higher-income women, despite being sexually active at the same rates.<sup>12</sup> Nationally half the women seeking abortions have incomes below the Federal Poverty Level and three-quarters reported not having enough money to pay for basic living expenses.<sup>13</sup>

In one study, women who were unable to get the abortion they sought were almost four times as likely to have their household income fall below the Federal Poverty Level, and were more likely to report not being able to cover basic living needs.<sup>14</sup>

Women who were denied an abortion were more likely to receive public assistance than those women who received abortions.<sup>15</sup>

Women denied abortions were more likely to end up in the future raising children alone in single parent households than were women who received an abortion.<sup>16</sup> Women denied an abortion have lower levels of full-time employment.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Martha J. Bailey et al., *The Opt-In Revolution? Contraception and the Gender Gap in Wages*, NAT'L BUREAU OF ECON. RESEARCH 26-27 (2012), available at [http://www.nber.org/papers/w17922.pdf?new\\_window=1](http://www.nber.org/papers/w17922.pdf?new_window=1)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Martha J. Bailey et al., *The Opt-In Revolution? Contraception and the Gender Gap in Wages*, NAT'L BUREAU OF ECON. RESEARCH 26-27 (2012), available at [http://www.nber.org/papers/w17922.pdf?new\\_window=1](http://www.nber.org/papers/w17922.pdf?new_window=1)

<sup>7</sup> ADAM SONFIELD ET AL., *GUTTMACHER INST., THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF WOMEN'S ABILITY TO DETERMINE WHETHER AND WHEN TO HAVE CHILDREN* (2013), available at <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/social-economic-benefits.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> KELLEEN KAYE ET AL., *NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT TEEN AND UNPLANNED PREGNANCY, THE BENEFITS OF BIRTH CONTROL IN AMERICA: GETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT 4* (2014), available at <http://thenationalcampaign.org/sites/default/files/resource-primary-download/getting-the-facts-straight-final.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Martha J. Bailey, 2013. "[Fifty Years of Family Planning: New Evidence on the Long-Run Effects of Increasing Access to Contraception](#)," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, Economic Studies Program*, The Brookings Institution, vol. 46(1) (Spring), pages 341-409.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ansirh.org/research/turnaway-study>

<sup>12</sup> Finer LB and Zolna MR, *Declines in unintended pregnancy in the United States, 2008–2011*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 2016, 374(9):843–852, <http://nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMsa1506575>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ansirh.org/research/turnaway-study>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ansirh.org/research/turnaway-study>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ansirh.org/research/turnaway-study>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ansirh.org/research/turnaway-study>

<sup>17</sup> <https://rewire.news/article/2018/10/04/stop-saying-that-making-abortion-illegal-doesnt-stop-them/>