

Good Evening. My name is Steve Finner and I am a resident of Barre City. Some of you may remember me as a now retired lobbyist for organized labor and United Academics, the University of Vermont faculty union. However, I am long been a supporter of reproductive and parental rights and served as Vice President of the Planned Parenthood Affiliate in Bangor Maine over fifty years ago. My testimony today is rooted in my Unitarian Universalist faith which affirmed reproductive rights and reproductive justice in a Statement of Conscience in 2015.

When the United States Supreme Court decided Roe v. Wade, no one anticipated the vicious attack on that decision which would take place and has continued since.

Now we are faced with the strong possibility that approximately half of the U.S. could soon greatly restrict abortion rights and other reproductive and health services.

Vermont can set an excellent example of what protections and safeguards are possible. Amending our state constitution is the best way to assure ongoing protection of reproductive freedom.

I hope this committee can move us in that direction by your passage of the Reproductive Liberty Amendment, also known as Prop 5.

I thank you for your service and for this opportunity to lend my voice to this proposal.

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It seems that the language of such a proposal to the Vt. constitution is way out of line for 75% or more of the citizens in VT. It is so general (I am not so sure that is correct) that the lawyers and the Vermont supreme court will be busy for the next 20 + years getting anything cleared up.

Also, the laws of Vermont already explain the choices people can use for themselves. There is no need to muddy the water with redundancy.

Serious education is needed, explaining why or why not a procedure may be used for a particular individual. Eliminate assumptions with education to be required for the so called patients.

Respectively submitted;

Michael H Thompson  
12 Hemlock Rd.  
Milton, VT. 05468

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Comments about Prop 5 from a citizen of Vermont

Dear Representatives,

I oppose PROP 5 and humbly ask you to do the same when it comes up for a vote.

I am opposed because the amendment, as written, is divisive. It does not settle the issue of whether society has an interest in the pre-born citizen, the health of the mother, or the rights and duties of parents. The amendment does not promote a common good.

In fact, the amendment is so poorly written that it does not give an advantage to anyone regardless of their position on the issue of responsible reproduction. The amendment will harden the positions of all involved and drag on and on in limitless court challenges. Can the people of Vermont afford to spend millions on lawyers? This amendment only applies when reproduction is contemplated or planned? It does not say anything about sex of any kind, heterosexual, homosexual, or otherwise. Would it apply to in-vitro fertilization or procedures for reproduction that do not involve intercourse? Kind of ironic that this amendment does not apply if reproduction is not intended. No intent to reproduce, then no autonomy. For example, people seeking to change their physical gender would not be covered by this amendment since the procedure renders them unable to reproduce. Is that the intent here?

Do the unborn have a right to "personal reproductive autonomy"? As a parent I am not in favor of my minor children to have any such autonomy. (The effect of which is that only the purveyor of "services" gets to advise my child of what's in their best interest.)

The Amendment does not guarantee that "personal reproductive autonomy" can be exercised safely. In fact, there are no safeguards in current law. Current law, and this amendment, even allow for "back-alley" or coat-hanger procedures. Would female genital mutilation be ok under this amendment? Could circumcision of male babies be prohibited under this amendment?

Medical personnel/practitioners have no conscience protections. Does that mean that I will lose my doctor if they must leave the state rather than go against personal beliefs? Will this raise the cost of medical care for everyone? One definition of "autonomy" is "self-directing freedom and especially moral independence"-*Merriam-Webster*. Doesn't that mean that everyone contemplating reproduction must be given all the available options and information available? Logically, no one is truly autonomous unless they have all the facts. Would this include ultrasounds? Accordingly, no one under the age of reason could be considered "autonomous".

Thanks for your time. Please respond to this letter.

Sincerely yours,  
Mike Bullock  
Hinesburg, VT

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Hello,

I am totally in support of a proposed amendment to the Vermont Constitution regarding the right to personal reproductive liberty.

This amendment concerns access to vital health care, which must be protected at all costs.

Thank you,

Catherine Bailey

Essex,  
VT

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Good Evening Representatives,

I would like to share both my own experiences with abortion and how those experiences relate to my concerns with Proposal 5. My name is Paul Godfrey and I have lived in Moretown VT for close to 5 years. Before I lived in Vermont I lived in China for almost 6 years. Soon after my wife and I were married, she became pregnant with our first child. During one of the first ultrasounds, the technician said to my wife, "You won't be able to have this child, it is missing a leg." My wife starting crying, so a doctor came over to see what was happening. He looked at the monitor, and after a minute, said, "everything is fine, the baby has two legs." The lesson for me was clear. It would have been our fault if we had allowed a baby with one leg to be born. The baby would have been a burden on society. The gain in personal reproductive autonomy that Proposal 5 promises is illusory if it results in a medical professionals deciding which babies should live and which should die. If that doctor had not had the patience or curiosity to come over and look; my wife's and my personal reproductive autonomy would have been taken away, not be a government decree, but by a doctor who could refuse to provide pregnancy care for a baby he believed should not be born. Further, the right (or in my case a duty) to abort a child because the child is missing a leg is a right that will have consequences beyond the individuals directly affected.

My second experience with abortion was more harrowing than the first. Thinking that I, being an foreigner, we would be able to have a second child, my wife and I decided to have another baby. I was teaching at a university in central China. The first months of my wife's pregnancy were uneventful. However, one day, I was called in to the International Affairs Office. My supervisor asked if my wife was pregnant. I told her she was. My supervisor told me that she had been contacted by the Family Planning agent located on campus who had observed my wife with our daughter and pregnant with a second child. The next months were a nightmare. We spent hours begging every relation we knew of way to spare our child. During the process, the university threatened to make my wife and daughter leave the city or else fire me. I was forced to call the United States Embassy so that my 2 year old daughter would not be separated from me, but it came at the cost of having to leave my job. The struggle was not over. We finally were able to find a contact who spoke to the Family Planning agent in my wife's hometown who agreed not to force us to have an abortion. Then, we had to find a hospital willing to provide birth care for a child who did not have permission to be born (In China, pregnant women need to obtain a Certificate of Birth Permission). Finally, my son was born. Before this happened, I thought personal reproductive autonomy only applied to women. However, the Chinese government, by attempting to force my wife to have an abortion, was also limiting my own personal reproductive autonomy. Without the government's permission, I could not reproduce.

This leads me to a second concern I have with Proposal 5. I do not believe that it contemplates the personal reproductive autonomy of men and this failure manifests itself in two ways. First, there has been a long history of men losing personal reproductive autonomy via sterilization. While this has also historically been a threat to women, the number of men sterilized is significant enough to warrant concern. Secondly, reproduction is an act that requires two individuals. The exercise of the right to personal reproductive autonomy by one individual may very well limit the right to personal reproductive autonomy by the second individual. The only personal reproductive autonomy a man has, is in the negative instance, which is, to not reproduce. By denying men an equal right to personal reproductive autonomy, society will send the message that men are not a valued or trusted partner in making reproductive decisions. While it may be tempting to right historic wrongs by devaluing men in this process; granting women a right at the expense of taking away the rights of their partners will end up hurting men and women. Instead, I urge you to value the lives of women, children (born and not yet born), and men by extending this right to personal reproductive autonomy to all.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony and considering the impacts your proposal may have. Sincerely,

Paul Godfrey

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Dear Sirs,  
PLEASE vote NO. (on proposal 5...do not make abortion legal)

I am a woman who has been pregnant 9 times.  
I have had 5 live births and 3 abortions(1 miscarriage)  
My 1st son was born before any abortions, {He was beautiful & I was not married at the time.}

but when I discovered I was pregnant and abortion was legal my partner(soon to be husband) then said abortion was ok. I didn't agree, but trusted the government.  
"they know what's right and will protect...."

WOW I can't get into all the details emotionally...  
it has been grueling & devastating knowing I KILLED 3 babies.  
They were innocent and alive in me/my womb.

"People" said it was ok....but I'm here to tell you it wasn't and isn't!  
I have since named all of them and know they wait for me in heaven.  
I don't excuse any of the abortions...1 was just out of convenience? so the 2nd was while I would've still been pregnant with the aborted/destroyed killed fetus.  
the 3rd was when I had moderate dysplasia and thought it would be bad for me & baby, BUT the Dr said it would not have effected the pregnancy or baby, but since it was legal i did!  
WOW I even heard it's heartbeat...so sad.  
HOW can I express that abortion is killing after having done this? How I wish/pray I can let women know how precious these children are and how precious they are. The children will bless their lives !!! abortion kills the babies, but also devastates the one getting the abortion- that very day, or month later, or a couple of years later. I have not met a woman who has not regretted their decision to get an abortion.  
PLEASE VOTE NO ON PROPSAL 5.  
thank you for considering what I shared.  
Patricia M Doyle  
South Royalton VT 05068

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Dear Vermont Legislators:

I am writing this to share my thoughts on Proposal 5, the proposed amendment to the Constitution of the State of Vermont regarding the right to personal reproductive freedom. I feel that this amendment is long overdue because Vermont has always led the way in support of reproductive freedom. Now that Roe is in jeopardy in the Supreme Court, it is more important than ever that we provide permanent protections for reproductive freedom here at home. Vermonters pride ourselves on being independent on the one hand, and taking care of our community members on the other. Reproductive freedom meets both of those ideals: citizens should be able to decide for themselves about pregnancies, and we should also rely on our neighbors to support everyone's right to make their own choices.

My personal perspective on this issue comes from early in my career, when I worked as a medical assistant at Planned Parenthood in Burlington. One of my roles was to support people seeking abortions, both before, during, and after their procedures. In the four years of my employment there, I never met a patient who didn't take the decision seriously. Sometimes the decision was gut-wrenching, and sometimes it was more straightforward, but people going through abortion were always grateful for the opportunity to choose for themselves. Now I am 24 years into a career as a family nurse practitioner in Waterbury, and unplanned pregnancies still happen, even with all the education and birth control options available. The reasons for this are numerous, including financial and psychosocial stressors, method failures, and sexual violence. We have come a long way as a state supporting birth control, sex education, and medicaid funding for pregnancy termination- adding the right to reproductive freedom to our state constitution is the next sensible step. Alison Hobart, APRN

Dear Legislators,

I understand that in a previous public hearing, you heard testimony that "there is no way to regulate abortion under Proposal 5". This is one of the reasons that I do not support Proposal 5. For the safety of mothers and children, abortion services should not be left unmonitored. Also, the language of Proposal 5 is so vague that Dr. Farr Curlin, Professor of Medicine at Duke University, after examining the wording of Proposal 5, concluded that "the language of this proposed amendment, on face value, threatens to require clinicians to cooperate in practices (whether abortion, gender affirmation therapies, or other) that they have good reason to believe contradict the purposes of medicine. The clause does not say what it means to infringe, or who is forbidden from infringing. If passed, it will invite claims that clinicians who will not cooperate with practices that violate historic medical ethics norms are thereby somehow violating Vermont patients' constitutional rights. That will be bad for Vermont clinicians and bad for the patients who need conscientious clinicians to care for them." Helen Alvare, Professor of Law at George Mason University, has also expressed similar concerns when examining the amendment. I am concerned that health care workers will be forced to perform abortions or other procedures under this Proposal that violate their beliefs and conscience. It also has the potential to open health care providers up to more lawsuits which will either drive up the cost of healthcare in our state or drive good providers out of our state.

Please consider ALL the ramifications of this legislation and vote no.

Thank you,  
Corinne Kehoe

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I am in support of the Reproductive Liberty Amendment. I believe that government restrictions can limit access to quality health care and worsen existing inequities. **I believe we need to protect people's right to access all reproductive health care options.**

The Reproductive Liberty Amendment will allow providers to continue to deliver quality, safe, and legal care to their patients. This is essential not only for women and families, but for our entire society.

Sincerely,

Kim McKellar

*Marshfield, VT*

I am writing to express my support for the Proposal 5 amendment to the Vermont Constitution. Protecting the right of women to have an abortion is imperative to preserving the autonomy and personal privacy of all women to control their reproductive lives.

We should all keep in mind that any woman who is even considering an abortion is already in a bad place. No one "wants" an abortion and no one has to have one. That is the way it should remain. It is a very private and personal decision that women are capable of making themselves. They should be able to consult with their doctors, family, clergy, whomever they choose, to help them with the decision. Know that this decision, whatever option is chosen, it is a difficult one.

Abortion should remain a safe and legal option, and protecting a woman's right to choose this option must be preserved.

Thank you,

Susan Mills

Shelburne

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I am writing in SUPPORT of Proposal 5, Article 22, Reproductive Liberty.

This is a matter of equality, not just reproductive liberty. All women free to make their own choices, equal to men...

It is also a matter of religious freedom. Many anti-abortion activists invoke God in their protests. What about separation of church and state? What about my rights as a non-religious person?

And it is a matter of healthcare privacy. What about HIPAA? Why should anyone other than a woman and her healthcare provider know the reason for a visit to a women's health clinic? Health care details are private. Period.

Lee Sheridan-Orr  
Shelburne, VT

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I would like to put on the record that I am strongly in favor of

**Proposal 5: Proposed Amendment to the Vermont Constitution Regarding the Right to Personal Reproductive Freedom**

It is such a fundamental right for women to choose what happens to their bodies. You have heard all the reasons why on so many different occasions I don't feel like I need to cite those reasons again. Suffice it to say, I expect our legislature to pass this again this legislative season so it can go out to the voters.

With appreciation, Judi Daly Moretown