

My name is Dr. Judy Stern from Clarendon VT and I am here to express my strong support for Proposal 5, the state constitutional amendment on reproductive liberty. For nearly 30 years I worked in the field of reproductive medicine at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center where I ran the in vitro fertilization laboratory. In that capacity I learned that decisions concerning reproduction include those to prevent, but also those to promote pregnancy. Without reproductive liberty we run the risk of losing access to needed reproductive healthcare.

At DHMC I watched daily as people made difficult decisions about reproduction. Decisions included those about how best to ensure a healthy singleton pregnancy from an IVF procedure, what to do when a pregnancy was difficult to obtain, and how best to proceed in cases of fetal diagnoses or otherwise complicated pregnancies. None of these decisions were easy. Patients struggled. They questioned themselves and their healthcare providers. But they relied on their freedom to make the necessary decisions according to their own value systems, their needs, and their abilities. Losing the rights to reproductive freedom could result in individuals losing the ability to make these important decisions on their own.

In my role at the fertility clinic, I also became aware of the all-too-common situation that a wanted pregnancy will result in miscarriage. Miscarriage can be particularly heartbreaking for people who have had trouble conceiving to begin with. It can also be medically dangerous when the miscarriage leaves products of conception in the uterus that become infected. Also heartbreaking is when a pregnancy implants outside of the uterus in tissues that can't support it. This is a condition known as ectopic pregnancy. Ectopic pregnancy is deadly if ignored and not treated quickly and there is nothing that can be done to save these pregnancies. We need providers who understand these conditions and who are trained in, experienced in, and available to deal with these reproductive problems. We need providers who will treat these conditions without hesitation. If these services are not available, women who experience these conditions either as a result of, or without fertility treatment, can lose their lives. Vermont's reproductive liberty amendment will help ensure the availability of these lifesaving procedures.

Please remember that pregnancies are complex, and black and white legislating around medical procedures can be dangerous, even deadly, for patients. Healthcare providers must retain the ability to make clinical decisions specific to each patient.

My experiences in the field of fertility care have convinced me that reproductive freedom is essential both for healthy pregnancies and to ensure that procedures for the safe and effective treatment of reproductive complications are available. For these reasons I strongly support Proposal 5 and I ask that you support it as well.

Thank you