

Testimony to legislature on abortion bill – Dr. Jean Helz – March 8, 2023

Position: Favorable

HB 808 Reproductive Health Services, Shielding

To: Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: Hearing 3/8 1:00 PM

My name is Dr. Jean Helz. I am a psychiatrist having practiced in Philadelphia for 14 years and in Cumberland in Allegany County Maryland for 27 years. I intend to testify to some of the extremely adverse effects of unintended pregnancy to both the woman and the fetus. Pregnancy is a potentially medically dangerous state for women. I didn't think much about abortion until New York legalized abortion. I felt a sense of relief, even more when the decision on Roe vs Wade came down. What made it real to me was when I was consulting as a psychiatrist on an obstetrical unit. A woman came in septic (an extremely dangerous potentially fatal blood infection) from a botched Caesarian section. The obstetricians said "we used to see this all the time before abortion was legalized." A patient I once saw suffered from renal failure, but otherwise lived a full life. If she did not have access to abortion, she would not be able to have any sex life because pregnancy would potentially be lethal to her.

There are many more medical situations dangerous to the woman, but let me focus for a moment on dangerous situations for the fetus. There is a condition called an anencephaly in which the baby develops no brain. Without access to abortion, a woman is forced to carry that baby to term who will not live more than a few hours or at most a few days after birth.

There is a relatively rare disorder called Tay Sachs disease which is genetic. Babies with this condition live only a few years and suffer an awful death with progressive failure of the brain and spinal cord to develop. Parents have to watch their baby have worsening problems including inability to walk, seizures, difficulty swallowing and many other problems. After so much trauma to parents and child, the baby inevitably dies by 5 years of age. Imagine a couple who has this defect in their genes risking having another baby without having the ability to know if they would have to repeat the same trauma. We have tests for this condition, but if abortion becomes illegal such tests would be meaningless.

Often those who support the individual's right to make these profound decisions are seen as encouraging abortion. I would like to describe the situation of a patient I once saw. She was struggling with the decision as to whether or not to continue a pregnancy. As we worked together, she decided that she did want to continue the pregnancy. This occurred without any coercion by the state.

I hope that you can open your minds to my testimony. The lives of your constituents depend on it.

Thank you for allowing me the time to testify on this vital issue.