

Testimony for Council

My name is Allison Sambo, and I am here to speak on behalf of resolution 68, in support of public funding for abortions. I believe that abortions are part of a comprehensive, equitable women's reproductive health care system and as such, should not be out of reach to those who cannot pay.

My experience in women's health both domestically and internationally for the past four years, as well as spending the previous year working on issues of health equity in the State of Wisconsin have strengthened my beliefs that no person should be unable to access the knowledge or services critical to her own well-being because of one's inability to pay. The gender inequalities in our system and the global system are compounded by the fact that the rates of women living in poverty have been and continue to be far higher than their male counterparts AND these rates have a racial or ethnic component, in that they are even more prevalent among communities of color, ethnic or religious minorities, and other marginalized communities. I have seen, firsthand, how policies that prohibit women's access to quality, safe reproductive healthcare services compound and deepen the poverty of women, threatening their health, the health of their families and entire communities. I have seen, firsthand, how this disproportionately affects marginalized and minority individuals. While women in Wisconsin have the right to abortion, amendments that limit access to those services to those who have the financial ability to pay disproportionately affects specific populations of women: low-income women, women of color, immigrant women, young women, and trans or non gender conforming individuals.

Since moving to Madison almost two years ago, I have watched my colleagues and the communities in which I live and work make great strides discussing and taking steps to address the racial and social inequities that pervade our greater Madison community. As a resident of the block in which a young, unarmed black man was killed less than two weeks ago, I have witnessed protestors of all races, genders, religions and ages gather and harness the anger and frustration they have for an inequitable system to productive dialogue and coordinated, collective action. I have been present during these efforts and dialogue to learn about the experiences of my friends, neighbors, my community and my city and understand my role in reproducing these inequities. I firmly believe that this amendment is part of the broader struggle for social justice in this community.

We stand at an important moment where these seemingly difficult conversations and decisions need to be made – how do we re-imagine and re-create our greater Madison community so that all can have access and support to live safe, healthy and productive lives, receiving the information and services they need to do so? – How can our system not only enable us to determine the life we want to live but also to support us in those choices? How can our system better reflect our values, and be a better place for us all?

We cannot do this without recognition that equity and justice for women, especially marginalized and minority communities, is a critical piece of this –that amendments that limit health care to those with the ability to pay have incredibly important racial and gender implications. So while at this important moment we are grappling with racial equity issues in the wake of such a tremendous loss– we cannot forget the way that race and class too often overlap, how women in these groups face even further marginalization – and importantly, that a range of systems have created and perpetuated racial and gender inequity, one of which is importantly reproductive healthcare.

Safe and affordable abortions are a part of a comprehensive health system for women – a comprehensive health system for women’s reproductive health is fundamental not only for women but for the entire community. Women’s right to plan their family and make decisions about bringing children into the world, are not just rights for those with the ability to pay, but must be protected for those who cannot. That is a system that enables us all to individually determine our future and receive support for-- or at the very least, remove the barriers to- making those decisions. The Hyde Amendment compromises this comprehensive, rights-based health system for women, particularly women of color, immigrant women, young women, and other marginalized groups of women – often who are the least economically able to find alternative means to access the services they desperately need.

Ultimately, this issue is a fundamental part of the broader push for justice in our community today. While this amendment does not seem to be racially or economically motivated, in practice we understand how it inequitably impacts communities of color and low income communities and as such, it is critical we pass a resolution to repeal the Hyde Act and maintain, in all parts, legislation that ensures comprehensive health care and reproductive justice for ALL women and all individuals who need access to a safe abortion.