

**TESTIMONY OF LORIE CHAITEN BEFORE THE COOK COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

Legislation and Intergovernmental Relations Committee

April 29, 2015

Good morning. My name is Lorie Chaiten and I am the Director of the Reproductive Rights Project for the ACLU of Illinois. I am here to testify in support of the proposed Resolution calling for access to comprehensive reproductive health care, including abortion, for all women, regardless of the source of their insurance.

42 years ago, in *Roe v. Wade*, the United States Supreme Court recognized a woman's constitutional right to make her own personal medical decisions about when or whether to have a child. Unfortunately, since *Roe*, federal and state laws and policies have been enacted that create harmful obstacles to obtaining comprehensive reproductive health care, including abortion.

The Hyde Amendment, first passed by Congress in 1976, specifically targets women struggling to make ends meet by banning Medicaid coverage for abortion except in the case of rape, incest, or to save the life of the pregnant woman.

Although a court order rightly requires Illinois to fill this gap, in practice it is very difficult to obtain this coverage: one study found that less than 10% of requests for Medicaid coverage for abortion in Illinois are honored.

In addition, nearly 80,000 women of reproductive age in Cook County are prohibited from accessing abortion coverage through their insurance, because they are government employees or because they are insured through Medicare, the military, or the VA. Federal politicians have also attached provisions to appropriations legislation barring insurance coverage of abortion for women who are Peace Corps volunteers, in federal prisons and detention centers, Native American women who utilize Indian Health Services, and low-income women in the District of Columbia.

These bans on insurance coverage for abortion are heavy-handed intrusions into a decision that is best left to a woman and her family. A woman's health insurance should enable her to take care of her health and well-being by covering a full range of legal medical procedures, including abortion. That way, she can make a real decision about what is best for her circumstances.

Low-income women who cannot access coverage for abortion care through Medicaid or other insurance often delay their procedures as they attempt to come up with the money to pay for them. This delay increase both the cost of the procedure as well as its health risks for the woman. Making abortion coverage straightforward, transparent, and accessible would better ensure that she will be able to see a licensed, quality health provider in a timely manner. No woman

should have to choose between paying rent or for food for her family and getting the health care she needs.

By adopting this resolution, the Cook County Board of Commissioners can take a timely and principled stand in support of equal access to reproductive health care for all women, at a time when these rights are being taken away across the country. Cook County has the opportunity to join the growing number of communities around the country that are standing up and voicing support for comprehensive reproductive health coverage that meets the real needs of women and families.

We are grateful for the opportunity to testify in support of this resolution and applaud the Board's commitment to supporting and protecting women's reproductive freedoms.

Thank you so much.