

Chair Kafoury, Multnomah County Commissioners, Thank you for hearing my testimony today. My name is Charley Downing, and I am a resident of Multnomah County. I am also an individual leader in the BRAVE coalition.

Being a member of BRAVE as an individual leader has impacted me greatly. The BRAVE work has provided me the opportunity to deepen my commitment to body autonomy, the dignity of all people, and the wellbeing of communities. The BRAVE community provides space for us to envision what it means for all people and communities to thrive. Having meaningful access to the full range of reproductive options for my family means that I, and the people I love and cherish will have access to accurate and respectful sexual health education, will have access to reproductive health care services that honor inherent dignity and worth and that we are able to make decisions regarding our reproductive lives that honor our lived experiences and decision making responsibilities.

I wanted to speak today about the Hyde Amendment, a federal restriction that impacts Oregonians' access to reproductive health care.

The Hyde Amendment, passed by Congress on September 30, 1976, has for more than 40 years denied abortion coverage to people who get their health insurance through federal programs, such as federal employees, veterans, those covered by Indian Health Services, and low-income people enrolled in Medicaid. Currently, Oregon and 14 other states fill the gap left by the federal Hyde Amendment by providing those enrolled in the state Medicaid plan with coverage for the full range of pregnancy-related services, including abortion. If this were to ever change, thousands in Multnomah County would be left without access.

In my own reproductive health journey, I have been fortunate. My Mother immigrated to this country as a teen and she was able to gain citizenship. I was born here. I have not always had access to health care nor insurance, yet despite my lack of access to regular preventative services, I have managed to piece together funds to maintain access to birth control between bouts of health care coverage. I have had two pregnancies resulting in one miscarriage and one live birth. Though both of my pregnancies occurred while I was using birth control, my body has for the most part been responsive to birth control.

I know that I have been fortunate because I have had the opportunity to love and support people with less "good luck." I have spoken to many pregnant people who find themselves pregnant despite their use of birth control, or who find the side effects of birth control unmanageable. Responsible and thoughtful people sometimes find themselves seeking abortion, despite best efforts to prevent pregnancy. And the barriers placed before them as they seek to access personal and healthy reproductive health care services deny their dignity and worth as whole human beings. I have spoken with a Mother, I will never forget, striving to raise two young children without the benefit of citizenship status, in an abusive relationship with a partner who was withholding important documentation for her application. She just found that she was pregnant, she was desperate to terminate so that she could focus on the children she was raising and on finding resources to help her to find her way out of domestic violence. Having dignified and equal access to the full range of reproductive healthcare should not be based on "luck." In a just world, the full range of reproductive health care would be meaningfully accessible, affirming, and dignified for all people. In my life that means people who also have type 1 diabetes, lack job security, struggle with mental health, housing security, have a history of trauma, are gender nonconforming, people who manage food insecurity, and people who are valued members of the community without citizenship status. That is what reproductive justice means to me.

Thank you so much for your leadership to pass this proclamation and affirm the importance of the full range of reproductive health care to every person who lives in Multnomah County, regardless of who they are, where they live or how much money they make. You are taking a meaningful step forward as we join a growing number of localities nationwide recognizing the importance of access to affordable abortion care, and reaffirming the right of all people to make decisions about their health care based on what's best for themselves and their families.