

Testimony of Christy Zink before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
March 15, 2016

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and other members of the Committee. My name is Christy Zink.

Through the wide-open door, the preschool classroom is bright and welcoming. Paintings on the wall delight the eye with their big, blue splotches. A string of paper lanterns, one for each student, hangs in the window. Bristle blocks; toy trains; puppets all wait on tables for those little hands to play.

This morning, like many, I've seen my daughter off to her third-grade class down the hall, and I'm taking a few extra minutes in the PreK room before I rush off to work, to sit with my son and his friends, to read a book aloud to them, and to take in their energy and wonder at the world.

Almost as soon as I hold up the book to start reading, one girl jumps up from her chair. "I'm the author!" she tells me, pointing to the page. "And I drew all those pictures!" another one says. "You're the illustrator?" I ask. "Really?" They both laugh, admitting, no, not really. But, I tell them, you *have* written a book together, right? And that one boy with the mess of curly hair runs across the room and retrieves the book they put together with help from their teacher: *A Day In the Life of the Kindness Snails*.

That's them—this class—The Kindness Snails: their own name they came up with together, and it's strangely perfect. Amidst all the rambunctious energy of being 4 and 5 years old, there's also a definite throughline of respect. The class rules, which they've proposed and agreed upon through a class vote, read this way: Listen. Use Kind Words. Gentle and Safe Bodies. Take Care of Each Other.

These lessons, together, echo in my head as I speak to you today. These messages are not radical. To be reminded of these basic tenets feels especially important, because I relearn them alongside my four-year-old son. He is what my community calls my *rainbow baby*. He's here today, thriving, and I'm here today to mother him, because I had access to safe, legal abortion when I most needed it. When I was carrying a baby in a previous pregnancy that had no chance at meaningful life, I was able to have a conversation with doctors about my options, along with the true, medical realities, and come to a decision to terminate my pregnancy, all of which happened after 20 weeks.

I invite you to return with me to those ideals, because what I have to say has immediate bearing on the potential legislation under discussion.

*Listen*. Please. I was pregnant in 2009. I took extra special care of myself, receiving excellent prenatal attention from an award-winning obstetrician. I breathed a sigh of relief when the pregnancy advanced past the first trimester. I grew more excited with

each test that showed a baby growing on target.. But the hard truth is that you can enter into an exam room with all good hopes for the anatomy scan more than halfway through your pregnancy, and leave with the first in a series of terrible but undeniable facts. I certainly hadn't imagined that at that stage of the pregnancy my husband and I would learn heartbreaking news.

When I was 21 weeks pregnant, an MRI revealed that our baby was missing the central connecting structure of the two parts of his brain. A specialist diagnosed the baby with agenesis of the corpus callosum. What allows the brain to function as a whole was simply absent. But that wasn't all. Part of the baby's brain had failed to develop. Where the typical human brain presents a lovely, rounded symmetry, our baby had small, globular splotches. In effect, our baby was missing one side of his brain.

Living in Washington, DC, a major city with one of the best children's hospitals in the country, my husband and I had access to some of the best radiologists, neurologists, and geneticists not just in this city or in the country, but in the world. We asked every question we could. The answers were far from easy to hear, but they were clear. No one could look at those MRI images and not know, instantly, that something was terribly wrong. His body had no capacity to repair this anomaly. While they could not give us hope, medical providers at the top of their field offered us their support, expertise, and the gift of the truth. Amidst the worst of news, *kind words*.

This condition could not have been detected earlier in my pregnancy. The prognosis was unbearable.

If a 20-week ban had been passed before my pregnancy, I would have had to carry to term and give birth to a baby whom the doctors concurred had no chance of a life and would have experienced near-constant pain if he survived. His condition would require surgeries to remove more of what little brain matter he had, to diminish what would otherwise be a state of near-constant seizures. Wires, tubes, electricity, machines, scalpels, surgery, pain and more pain. My daughter's life, too, would have been irrevocably hurt by an almost always-absent parent.

*Safe care.* The decision I made to have an abortion at almost 22 weeks was made out of love and to *spare* my son's pain and suffering. At no point in this decision and the resulting medical care would the sort of political interference under consideration have helped me or my family. It would not have added safety and, in fact, it only would have heaped unnecessary struggle on top of a time of grief. It would have created pain. Instead, the abortion care I received was safe, expert, gentle, and compassionate.

I am also horrified to think that the doctors who humanely and objectively explained to us the prognosis and our options for medical treatment, and the doctor who helped us terminate the pregnancy, could be prosecuted as criminals for providing basic, safe medical care and expertise. The legislation under discussion does not represent the best interests of anyone, especially families like mine. What happened to me during

pregnancy can happen to any woman. This proposed legislation is downright cruel, as it would inflict pain on the families, the women, and the babies it purports to protect.

*Take care of each other.* It's in honor of my son that I'm here today, speaking on his behalf. I am also fighting for all women, to have the same right to access safe, legal, high-quality abortion care when we need to beyond 20 weeks—even for those women who could never imagine they'd have to make this choice.

Women need abortion care for a variety of reasons, at various stages of pregnancy. That real-world stories, such as mine, can be hard to tell means that you might not hear them as often as you should. But my situation underscores how very wrongheaded abortion bans can be. That a woman like me can receive devastating news about the state of her pregnancy only after 20 weeks is only one example of why we cannot—and should not—legislate against the wide multitude of reasons women choose to end pregnancies.

*Listen* to those of us asking you to not legislate our personal, private medical decisions.

*Use kind words* when talking about those of us making the best decisions for our families and the medical experts providing the abortion care we need.

Help us maintain *safe bodies* by ensuring we have access to medical experts using evidence-based best practices instead of heated rhetoric to provide our care.

Finally, join me and my children in *taking care of each other*. Legislation under consideration by the Committee creates dangerous situations for women and their families. It interferes with the exchange of evidence-based medical information between women and their doctors. It takes away essential choices that women need to consider with their partners, their medical teams, and the people they trust most. If we are to take care of each other, to treat each other as equals, then it begins by recognizing that abortion is a private decision, made not under threat of unfair law, but within the context of our own real and complex lives.