

Senator Baldwin
Testimony for Senate Judiciary Hearing: S.1696, The Women's Health Protection Act: Removing
Barriers to Constitutionally Protected Reproductive Rights
July 15, 2014

Thank you, Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Grassley, and Senator Blumenthal for holding this important hearing on women's health equity. I am encouraged that the Committee is pursuing a constructive conversation on this issue, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share my work on the Women's Health Protection Act.

And, I would also like to recognize the tireless advocacy of my Wisconsin State Representative Chris Taylor, who is here today to share her experience working to defend women's access to care in Wisconsin. I thank her for her testimony today.

Americans across the country expect to have access to high quality, dependable health care when they and their families need it. Indeed, my colleagues and I have worked to reform and improve our health care system to expand access to quality, affordable health care options so that all patients have care that meets their needs.

Unfortunately, for women across this country, this access has come under attack. Over the last 40 years, politicians across the country have been increasingly chipping away at the Constitutional rights guaranteed under *Roe v. Wade*, which affirmed that women have the right to make their own, personal health care decisions and to have access to safe and legal reproductive care.

Since that landmark decision by our nation's highest court, too many states have been trying to turn back the clock on women's access to quality care.

In just the past three years, states across the country have enacted a total of 205 provisions that restrict women's access to safe abortion services. This year, 13 states have been busy working to erode women's freedoms and have already adopted 21 new restrictions designed to limit access to abortion.

In my home state of Wisconsin, we are now ranked as one of the worst states when it comes to women's reproductive rights thanks to the restrictive measures enacted by our Governor and legislature.

To name just one, last year our Governor signed a measure forcing women – who are already required by law to make two separate trips to the clinic – to also undergo an invasive ultrasound 24 hours before receiving abortion care.

This same law also forces health care professionals to have unnecessary admitting privileges at a local hospital. If it was not for a federal judge temporarily blocking this provision, two of Wisconsin's four abortion clinics would have been forced to shut their doors and others would have been forced to reduce services, leaving many Wisconsin women out in the cold.

But, women and their families should not have to rely on last minute court decisions to be able to make the best health decisions for themselves and their families.

I recently heard from a mother in Middleton, Wisconsin, who wasn't so lucky. When she found out her baby had a severe fetal anomaly and would not survive delivery, she had to endure the consequences of the Governor's new law before the judge blocked the provision.

She had to undergo an emergency termination and a clinic in Milwaukee was the only place that would do the procedure. But because the Governor was set to sign this law imposing unreasonable requirements on providers, the clinic was preparing to close its doors and would not schedule her procedure. She and her husband were forced to find childcare for their two sons, and travel out of state so she could access the medical care she needed.

The threat in Wisconsin and in states across the country is clear.

Some politicians are doing this because they think they know better than women and their doctors. The fact is, they don't.

Women are more than capable of making their own personal, medical decisions without consulting their legislator.

It is not the job of politicians to play doctor and to dictate how professionals practice medicine. Nor is it our job to intrude in the private lives and important health decisions of American families

This is why I was proud to introduce the Women's Health Protection Act with my colleagues Senator Blumenthal and Congresswoman Chu to put a stop to these relentless attacks on women's freedoms.

The Women's Health Protection Act would prohibit these laws that undermine and infringe on a woman's Constitutional rights guaranteed under Roe v. Wade. Specifically, our bill would outlaw any mandate or regulation that does not significantly advance women's health or the safety of abortion services. Our legislation also protects women by invalidating measures that make abortion services more difficult to access and restrictions on the provision of abortion services that are not imposed on any other medical procedures.

Congress is responsible for enforcing every American's fundamental rights guaranteed by our Constitution. Throughout history, when states have passed laws that make it harder – or even impossible – to exercise those rights, we have necessarily stepped in with federal protections. The Women's Health Protection Act would ensure that every woman – no matter where she lives—has access to safe, quality reproductive care without interference from politicians.

We need to act now to guarantee that American women will continue to have the freedom to make their own health care decisions and to have access to essential, quality women's health care services.

I stand with 35 of my Senate colleagues and over 120 members of the House of Representatives to move our country forward with the Women's Health Protection Act, and I urge the Committee to help us advance this important measure to safeguard women's access to care and her constitutional rights no matter where she lives. Thank you.