

Testimony of Amanda Zurawski
Before the Senate Judiciary Committee
“The Assault on Reproductive Rights in a Post-*Dobbs* America”
April 26, 2023

Hello, my name is Amanda Zurawski, and I’m here to tell you a little bit about my experience with the Texas abortion bans.

About eight months ago, I was thrilled to be cruising through the second trimester of my first pregnancy. I was carrying our daughter, Willow, who had finally, blissfully been conceived after 18 months of grueling fertility treatment. My husband and I were beyond thrilled.

Then, on a sunny August day, after I had just finished the invite list for the baby shower my sister was planning for me, everything changed. Some unexpected and curious symptoms arrived and I contacted my obstetrician to be safe, and was surprised when I was told to come in as soon as possible. After a brief examination, my husband and I received the harrowing news that I had dilated prematurely due to a condition known as cervical insufficiency. Soon after, my membranes ruptured, and we were told by multiple doctors that the loss of our daughter was inevitable. It was clear that this was not a question of if we would lose our baby; it was a question of when.

I asked what could be done to ensure the respectful passing of our baby, and what could protect me from a deadly infection now that my body was unprotected and vulnerable.

My healthcare team was anguished as they explained there was nothing they could do because of Texas’s anti-abortion laws, the latest of which had taken effect two days after my water broke. It meant that even though we would, with complete certainty, lose Willow, my doctor’s didn’t feel safe enough to intervene as long as her heart was beating or until I was sick enough for the ethics board at the hospital to consider my life at risk and permit the standard healthcare I needed at that point—an abortion.

If we had conceived the previous year when we began our journey with infertility, or if we lived in a different state, my healthcare team would have been able to treat me immediately and end my pregnancy as soon as possible, without risk to my life or my health. I wouldn’t have had to wait in anguish for days for the inescapable ill fate that awaited. But this was August 23, 2022, in the state of Texas, where abortion is illegal unless the pregnant person is facing “a life-threatening physical condition aggravated by, caused by, or arising from a pregnancy.” Somehow, the medical help I needed to alleviate the horrific inevitability of losing my beloved child 22 weeks early could have been considered illegal.

People have asked why we didn’t get on a plane or in our car to go to a state where the laws aren’t so restrictive. But we live in the middle of Texas, and the nearest “sanctuary” state is at least an 8-hour drive. Developing sepsis—which can kill quickly—in a car in the middle of the West Texas desert, or 30,000 feet above the ground, is a death sentence, and it’s not a choice we should have had to even consider.

So all we could do was wait. I cannot adequately put into words the trauma and despair that comes with waiting to either lose your own life, your child's, or both. For days, I was locked in this bizarre and avoidable hell. Would Willow's heart stop, or would I deteriorate to the brink of death?

The answer arrived three long days later. In a matter of minutes, I went from being physically healthy to developing a raging fever and dangerously low blood pressure. My husband rushed me to the hospital where we soon learned I had developed sepsis—a condition in which bacteria in the blood develops into infection, with the ability to kill in under an hour. Several hours later, after stabilizing just enough to deliver our stillborn daughter, my vitals crashed again. In the middle of the night, I was rapidly transferred to the ICU, where I would stay for three days as medical professionals battled to save my life.

I spent another three days in a less critical unit of the hospital – all because I was denied access to reasonable healthcare due to Texas's new abortion bans.

What I needed was an abortion, a standard medical procedure. An abortion would have prevented the unnecessary harm and suffering that I endured. Not only the psychological trauma that came with three days of waiting, but the physical harm my body suffered, the extent of which is still being determined. I needed an abortion to protect my life, and to protect the lives of my future babies that I hope and dream I can still have one day.

Two things I know for sure: The preventable harm inflicted on me has already, medically, made it harder than it already was for me to get pregnant again. The barbaric restrictions that are being passed across the country are having real life implications on real people. I may have been one of the first who was affected by the overturning of Roe in Texas, but I'm certainly not the last. More people have been and will continue to be harmed until we do something about it. And no one should be forced to remain pregnant against their will for any reason, emergency or no emergency.

You have the power to fix this. You owe it to me and to Willow and to every other person who may become pregnant in this country to protect our right to safe and accessible healthcare. You owe it to our partners, our brothers, our fathers, our uncles and everyone else who should not have to worry about the life of their loved ones simply because they are with child. Your job is to protect the lives of the people who elected you, not endanger them. Being pregnant is difficult and complicated enough. We do not need you to make it even more terrifying and, frankly, downright dangerous to create life in this country. This has gone on long enough, and it's time now for you to do your job—your duty—and protect us.