

Many people seem to think a woman's pregnancy is an open invitation to decide what is best for her. It is clear that some value the life of an unborn child over that of the woman and the lives she is already supporting. Lawmakers who know nothing of a woman's complex life circumstances, should have no voice in her decision-making, particularly when it comes to pregnancy.

Recent passed or proposed abortion laws have outraged many of us. There have been fifteen restrictive abortion bills passed in our country this year. Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey signed a bill which bans all abortions in her state- with no exceptions for rape or incest- and imposes prison sentences on doctors who perform them. Criminalizing physicians is an attempt to prohibit safe abortions.

Many states that have passed or proposed new laws, including Georgia, Alabama and Missouri, have the worst public health outcomes in the nation. It is no coincidence that states with the most restrictive abortion laws have the highest maternal mortality rates. Unsafe abortion is a leading cause of maternal mortality in many developing countries.

We know from the past, banning the termination of an early pregnancy does not stop abortions. Prior to Roe v. Wade thousands of women died from illegal procedures. Most major hospitals had sepsis wards for women who developed overwhelming infections after an illegal abortion. We do not want to go back to that world.

Some opposed to abortion focus on the termination of "late" pregnancies. Ninety-eight percent of abortions are performed in the first 3 months of pregnancy. Those performed later result from a diagnosis of severe fetal abnormalities incompatible with life. Some terminations of a late pregnancy are required to save a woman's life.

Many patients come to mind- the 13 year-old Girl Scout who was pregnant because her older brother's friend raped her while she was playing in a treehouse. The 35 year-old insulin-dependent diabetic who presented in early pregnancy with unstable angina, secondary to severe coronary artery disease. She underwent a life saving termination of pregnancy and a 5-vessel coronary artery bypass surgery on the same day.

A woman hemorrhaging in her 2nd trimester requiring multiple blood transfusions and transfer to our hospital for a simple life saving surgical procedure. Remarkably, no physician had been trained to perform this surgery at her hospital.

The barrage of legislation attempting to regulate abortion represents a distrust of both women and their physicians. The bills show a disregard for the years care providers have devoted to clinical judgement, medical/surgical skills and developing relationships with our patients.

We are grateful to the other doctors, activists, legislators and organizations who are fighting to protect access to a safe, legal abortion in NH and across our country. Women and their care providers should be making personal medical decisions, not lawmakers.

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