

Testimony of Congresswoman Judy Chu (CA-27)
Hearing on “S. 1696, The Women’s Health Protection Act: Removing Barriers to
Constitutionally Protected Reproductive Rights”
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
July 15, 2014

Thank you Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Grassley, and Senator Blumenthal for the opportunity to testify today.

Every woman should have access to affordable and comprehensive health care coverage that protects her right to choose. This should be the case regardless of her income, the type of insurance she has or the state she resides in, so she can make personal health decisions based on what is best for her and her family.

We are witnessing a historic moment. Attacks on reproductive rights are intensifying. Having lost in our court system with *Roe v. Wade*, opponents of reproductive freedom are trying to undercut our Constitutional right and make it increasingly difficult to access a legal abortion.

They’re trying to take us back to a time before *Roe*, when 1.2 million women resorted to illegal abortions each year. They’re goal is to take us back to a time when unlicensed doctors, in unsanitary conditions, performed abortions that led to infections, hemorrhages, and at times, death. They’re taking us back to a time when many women knew the hazards, but they risked all of this because they were desperate – and this was their only option.

The new trend is to shut down abortion services – this time, state-by-state.

This is happening all across the country – individual states have signed into law restrictive regulations that single out abortion services. Between 2011 and 2013, more than two dozen states passed over 200 restrictions that block access to abortion services. This translates to more restrictions placed on women’s health care in three years than in the entire preceding decade.

The effect of these laws is that a woman’s constitutional right now depends on her zip code. The rights of women residing in my home state of California now vastly differ from the rights of women living in Texas or Mississippi. According to the Guttmacher Institute, 56 percent of women – over half of women in our country -- now live in a state that is hostile to abortion.

These laws range from mandatory waiting periods to biased counseling requirements to the exact size requirements and corridor width for the offices in which the procedure is to take place.

They are laws like the recent one in Texas, which make no sense medically. They require doctors performing abortion procedures to have formal admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles of their clinic, among other senseless requirements. We already see the effects. After the law passed, clinics began closing their doors. For women in Texas, this means longer waits,

higher costs, and canceled appointments. Some have to travel over 150 miles to get to the nearest clinic. These obstacles have put many women in desperate circumstances, some of which may very well endanger their lives.

We need laws that put women's health and safety first – not politics.

This is why we introduced the Women's Health Protection Act this Congress. We recognized that without the ability to access it, the *right* to abortion is meaningless. This bill would outlaw the restrictive state laws that target abortion services and shut down clinics across the country... State laws that make abortion harder – *and sometimes impossible* – to obtain. The bill would outlaw state-mandated medical procedures such as forced ultrasounds, restrictions on medication abortions, and other onerous TRAP laws.

Simply put: This bill would end discrimination against abortion access for women based on their zip code.

I am so proud to be the lead sponsor of this bill in the House, and to partner with Senators Blumenthal, Baldwin, and Congressmembers Fudge and Frankel – to push as hard as we can on this bill. We already have 124 cosponsors in the House.

Constitutional rights should never be subject to the personal whims or beliefs of political leaders. Nor should the safety of mothers, daughters, sisters or wives be jeopardized in the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and thank you for holding this important hearing to discuss how we can protect the health, safety and rights of all women.