Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 12 August 2022 05:30



W*ashington* D.C. – Senator Ben Ray Luján D-N.M., joined Senator Patty Murray D-WA, Chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, Senator Alex Padilla D-CA, and Senator Jacky Rosen D-NV, on Aug. 2 and introduced the *Let Doctors Provide Reproductive Health Care Act* to protect doctors against Republicans' non-stop attacks and ensure they can safely provide abortion care in states where it is still legal. The Senators took to the Senate floor later that week to seek unanimous consent to pass the legislation.

Republicans' nonstop attacks against women's reproductive freedom has long targeted doctors, with state laws like Texas' SB8 allowing for anyone to bring a lawsuit against an abortion provider. But in the wake of the Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade, these attacks have ramped up—with Republican state legislators drafting legislation that would make it a crime to perform an abortion on a state resident even in another state where abortion is legal .

And already, abortion providers are facing non-stop attacks from Republican politicians, including Dr. Caitlin Bernard—an abortion provider who is facing legal threats after providing legal abortion care to a 10-year-old rape victim who was forced to cross state lines. Bernard's case is emblematic of what abortion providers across the country are facing, as Republicans lob legal threats and intimidate doctors providing legal abortion care.

The *Let Doctors Provide Reproductive Health Care Act* will help protect against these attacks, ensuring that providers in states where abortion remains legal are protected from any efforts to

restrict their practice or create uncertainty about their legal liability.

"Overturning Roe v. Wade not only jeopardizes the health and wellbeing of women, but it now can throw medical professionals in legal jeopardy even in states that continue to honor a woman's right to choose," Luján said. "Having medical professionals subjected to constant fear, persecution, and legal prosecution is wrong and does not create safe environments for patients or providers. The *Let Doctors Provide Reproductive Health Care Act* is a critical bill to help protect those who are protecting women and their personal medical decisions."

"Doctors shouldn't be punished for providing their patients with legal abortion care—full stop. The legal threats, the intimidation, and the non-stop attacks from Republicans against abortion providers are unacceptable, and Democrats are fighting back," Murray said. "This bill is simple: it protects doctors providing legal abortion care, and ensures they can practice medicine and save lives without threat. It's urgent that we protect the doctors so many women depend on, so this week we're calling for unanimous consent to get this done—and Republicans will either stand aside so we can pass this bill, or show once and for all that their messaging that they 'don't want to punish doctors' is hollow."

"Abortion access is a fundamental right—and California will proudly remain a safe place for people to receive the care they need," Padilla said. "As Republicans continue to pass cruel legislation rolling back reproductive rights, we must protect health care providers from overreach by anti-abortion states. I urge my colleagues to pass the *Let Doctors Provide Reproductive Health Care Act*
to protect the courageous women and men delivering essential medical care to those who need it."

"As MAGA Republicans in Congress continue their efforts to ban abortion nationwide, we're introducing legislation to protect doctors in states where abortion remains legal from facing prosecution by anti-choice states," Rosen said. "Nevada is a strongly pro-choice state, and no Nevada doctor should be punished by another state's restrictive abortion laws simply for doing their jobs and providing health care to women in our state."

"As a full-spectrum OBGYN and abortion provider, I wholeheartedly appreciate the Senate's effort to create legislation that protects our ability to provide important reproductive healthcare for our patients. I have experienced personal and professional harassment for simply doing my job, including inflammatory and intimidating statements from the highest levels of my home

state government and threats of violence from people I have never met. This behavior cannot continue," Bernard, who has endorsed the legislation, said.

Bernard explained how making doctors face legal repercussions for giving abortions could affect the OBGYN workforce.

"Living in a state with one of the highest maternal mortality risks and with a severe shortage of OBGYN specialists, I can say firsthand how much people in my state need the care I and other OBGYNs provide," Bernard said. "If we do not stop this state-sanctioned harassment, we will lose OBGYNs and health risks will increase substantially. I stand with our Senators to promote the Let Doctors Provide Reproductive Health Care Act to preserve our ability provide important health services in my home state, including abortion care."

"Imagine looking someone in the eye and saying: 'I have all the skills and the tools to help you, but our state's politicians have told me I can't,'" Dr. Nisha Verma with Physicians for Reproductive Health said. "As a doctor, I am being forced to grapple with impossible situations more and more – situations where the laws of my state directly violate the medical expertise I gained through years of training and the oath I took to provide the best care to my patients. I am heartbroken that the people in my communities in the South are not able to access the same quality of care as those living in other parts of the country, not because their doctors don't have the skills or knowledge to provide that care, but because they are prohibited from doing so by abortion bans that are based solely on politics. Politics. Not medicine."

"Being an abortion provider means being for our communities, supporting them and providing care in the way they want or need. It also means living with the threat of surveillance, harassment, intimidation and violence from those that seek to eliminate abortion access and harm providers of this care. This is our reality," Dr. Jamila Perritt, an OBGYN and President andCEO of Physicians for Reproductive Health, said.

Perritt spoke highly of the *Let Doctors Provide Reproductive Health Care Act.*

"Considering the long history of harm against abortion providers, I am glad to see Congress introducing the *Let Doctors Provide Reproductive Health Care Act," Perritt said. "*Every person - abortion providers, supporters, staff, every person in our community deserves support and

protection. We deserve to do what we are trained to do: provide comprehensive reproductive health care that patients need without bias, shame, or stigma. We deserve to provide this essential health care without violence or harassment."

The *Let Doctors Provide Reproductive Health Care Act* will ensure that providers in states where abortion remains legal are protected from any efforts to restrict their practice or create uncertainty about their legal liability. Specifically, the bill will:

Protect health care providers in states where abortion is legal from being subject to laws that try to prevent them from providing reproductive health care services or make them liable for providing those services to patients from any other state. These protections could be enforced by a federal lawsuit from the Department of Justice, a patient, or a provider, ensuring a future Department of Justice could not turn a blind eye to state laws that violate these protections;

Prohibit any federal funds from being used to pursue legal cases against individuals who access legal reproductive health care services or against health care providers in states where abortion is legal;

Create a new grant program at the Department of Justice to fund legal assistance or legal education for reproductive health care service providers;

Create a new grant program at the Department of Health and Human Services to support reproductive health care service providers in obtaining physical, cyber, or data privacy security upgrades necessary to protect their practice and patients; and

Protect reproductive health care providers from being denied professional liability insurance coverage because of legal services offered to patients.

In addition to Senator Luján, Murray, Padilla, and Rosen, the legislation is also co-sponsored by Senators Schumer D-N.Y, Bennet D-CO, Markey D-MA, Stabenow D-MI, Heinrich D-N.M., Blumenthal D-CT, Wyden D-OR, Warren D-MA, Merkley D-OR, Smith D-MN, Van Hollen D-MD, Cardin D-MD, Menendez D-N.J., Klobuchar D-MN, Murphy D-CT, Reed D-RI, Cortez Masto

D-NV, Whitehouse D-RI, Hirono D-HI, Sanders I-VT, and Duckworth D-IL.