

Senate Democrats host briefing on abortion rights

Written by By Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M.
Friday, 26 January 2024 00:00



Discussion held ahead of Roe v. Wade anniversary

WASHINGTON D.C. — U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., joined U.S. Senator Patty Murray, D-Wash., and Senate Democrats to host a briefing on the state of abortion rights in America, the chaos and cruelty of the abortion bans that have been enacted in Republican-led states since Roe was overturned, and the need to pass legislation to restore the right to abortion nationwide. The briefing was held during the week of Jan. 15.

At the briefing, 19 Senate Democrats heard from and asked questions of panelists Dr. Austin Dennard, a Texas OB/GYN and patient plaintiff in the *Zurawski v. Texas* case who was forced to leave her state for abortion care after receiving a fatal fetal diagnosis that threatened her health; Jessica Valenti, founder of the comprehensive daily newsletter *Abortion Every Day* that tracks anything and everything happening with abortion; and Dr. Serina Floyd, Chief Medical Officer for Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington, DC and a fellow with Physicians for Reproductive Health.

The briefing highlighted the horrific fallout from the Dobbs decision—including the pain and suffering women are being forced to endure in states where abortion is now banned. During the briefing, Senate Democrats made clear that they will keep talking about abortion at every opportunity, using every tool at their disposal to shine a light on the awful realities the Dobbs decision created and relentlessly make the case for restoring and expanding abortion access nationwide.

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During his questioning, Heinrich asked Floyd and Dennard about the specific impact of the Dobbs decision on states like New Mexico and the patients who are now having to travel great distances to access reproductive health care.

“Talk to us a little bit about the impact that the Dobbs decision is really having on all the states where abortion is still legal and states like mine that had limited infrastructure to serve our own community that are now really having to provide services for multiple states around us as well,” Heinrich said. “I’d love your thoughts as well on the impact logistically that travel is having on patients across the country.”

Floyd took time to answer Heinrich’s question.

“What it means is that there is increased demand in these places. There are higher volumes. There are delays to being able to access care. There are longer wait times,” Floyd said.

“For patients, there are higher costs associated with traveling.”

She also talked about the toll it’s taking on providers.

“For providers who are trying to accommodate the increases in volume that they may be seeing, it oftentimes means you may have to re-look at your schedules. You have to figure out how do I change my work flows, how do I change my staffing levels so I have enough people to take care of the patients we are seeing...What that translates into ultimately is absolutely overwhelmed,” she said.

Dennard, speaking from her personal perspective, addressed the emotional toll of delays and the need to travel out-of-state for abortion care.

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“Personally, in addition to just the absolute heartbreak of finding our diagnosis and knowing that I needed an abortion, I just would like everyone in this room to think about what it’s like to have a surgery from someone you’ve never met. It’s scary. It’s very scary. And even as an OB/GYN, understanding the procedure, understanding that what I was going through as far as my abortion was very low risk, and I was in good hands, it’s absolutely terrifying,” she said.

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