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Reproductive rights


Allix Hillebrand column: Science supports expanding access to abortion in Virginia

BY ALLIX HILLEBRAND

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Reproductive health care — and abortion specifically — is under attack not only across our country, but in the commonwealth. Unfortunately, earlier this year politicians in Virginia stood in the way of expanding access to abortion, keeping this vital care out of reach for the majority of Virginians who need it — especially the young, rural people and people of color.

Last week, the Virginia General Assembly returned for its veto session in Richmond, and legislators continued the conversation about whether people should have autonomy over their bodies, their lives and their futures.

Decisions about whether and when to become a parent are one of the most personal and important life decisions a person can make. And when people are allowed to make their own decisions, families thrive and communities where everyone can participate with dignity are nurtured.

This is why, according to a survey by Public Policy Polling, 72 percent of Virginians believe abortion should be legal, safe and accessible.

This widespread belief is matched by the consensus in the medical community that every woman and pregnant person should have access to abortion care and that imposing burdensome, medically unnecessary regulations hurts women's health.

As a fourth-year medical student who has assisted with providing abortion care in Virginia, I've seen firsthand the importance of ensuring patients have access to the care they need so they can make the best decisions for their future and families. I've also seen the impact our state regulations have on whether someone can access abortion care.

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Virginians currently face a web of medically unnecessary barriers — like 24-hour waiting periods and mandatory ultrasounds — that hinder their ability to access abortion care and reduce the timeliness and efficiency of the care patients need.

For example, women seeking an abortion in Virginia must undergo mandatory, biased counseling before receiving care — and they must wait at least 24 hours before they are actually able to have the procedure. I've seen people struggle to access the care they need when they are forced to wait and make multiple, unnecessary trips to the health care center. It is no surprise that extraneous regulations like this disproportionately impact low-income women and women of color.

Recent research from the National Academies for Sciences, Engineering and Medicine underscores that the types of regulations imposed by Virginia — including burdensome provider and facility requirements and mandatory waiting periods — do not increase the safety of the procedure and ultimately harm women. Moreover, it confirms that abortion is a safe and effective procedure.

My experience assisting with providing abortion care in Virginia has only reaffirmed my passion for not only becoming an OB-GYN physician, but becoming a compassionate abortion provider. I'm looking forward to ensuring my patients have the freedom to make their own decisions about their health and deciding when or if to become a parent.

Right now, you are seeing this message because our ad system is having trouble displaying ads on this page. This is a medically dangerous ideology that denies patients access to abortion and criminalizes people who seek one.

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I urge the members of the Virginia General Assembly to stand with women and pregnant people across our commonwealth and protect access to safe, legal, accessible abortion care in our communities. It's time for politicians to put the facts first and stop imposing their personal beliefs on others. Virginia must pass laws that respect, support and empower women.

Allix Hillebrand is pursuing a medical degree in obstetrics and lives in Arlington. She is a member of Medical Students for Choice. Contact her at Allix.Hillebrand@gmail.com.



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