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Caitlin Gustafson: The Idaho Legislature is coming into my exam rooms to make your health care decisions

Sun., March 13, 2022



Caitlin Gustafson, MD

By Caitlin Gustafson, M.D.

As a family doctor in Idaho for nearly two decades, I have the privilege of caring for people through some of the highs and lows of life. I share in the joyous occasion of caring for many patients with desired pregnancies and I'm also there for patients and their loved ones as they contend with pregnancies that are unplanned, unintended or have unexpected complications where they choose abortion care. These situations are as complex and varied as all of us and as unique as each of our lives.

These stories reflect everyone in Idaho. They reflect you. You or a person you love seeking an abortion is often a parent already. You could have received test results that your fetus has a serious medical condition, or news that this pregnancy could risk your safety, or your life. Some of you have been in the throes of addiction, substance use, chronic physical or mental illness, or in an abusive relationship. You may be a pastor, a teacher, a politician or the partner of one, or an anti-abortion protester, but what I've learned over my two decades of providing care is that life is hard, it's messy, and decisions about pregnancy are complicated.

When we face difficult and painful decisions in our health we turn to our families, our friends, our faith communities and our physicians. I believe our elected officials shouldn't be involved in making these intimate, personal medical decisions.

Idaho lawmakers see this differently. Senate Bill 1309 is on its way to becoming Idaho law. This is essentially a copy of Texas' abortion ban, SB 8, which has proven to be harmful to women's health, families and communities. You or your loved one may be so early in pregnancy that you didn't even know you were pregnant – but once this bill becomes law, physicians in Idaho won't be able to provide you the critical medical care you need. We'll be telling you that the nearest provider is in Spokane, Portland, Seattle or Bend, Oregon. This devastating law will not only make abortion very early in pregnancy illegal in Idaho, it will allow relatives of the patient to sue your doctor if you receive what is still standard medical care.

By passing SB 1309, Idaho lawmakers will be making your health care decisions for you. They intend to put the government in charge of your bodily autonomy. This bill is evidence that they don't believe you and your medical provider are capable of making this decision, and they are willing to take away your personal freedom. If SB 1309 becomes law in Idaho, your health and your future are being placed in the hands of politicians.

Now is the time to make our voices heard to maintain our right to make decisions about our own pregnancy, and to protect the patient-doctor relationship and access to standard medical care in Idaho. Call your legislators and tell them to oppose this harmful ban.

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