

Women's Health and Reproductive Rights

Women make up 50% of the population in Texas, and yet only 30% of Texas state legislators are women. The unfortunate result is that women's rights often are not only ignored in our state but are undermined.

One of the most important rights that women should have concerns health care. I stand firmly in support of a woman's right to make her own decisions about her health, including her reproductive health. With advice from her medical team and support from her family, women can and should make these decisions without interference from local, state, or federal government.

As we have seen recently here in Texas, the state's interference in a woman's medical decisions during a high-risk pregnancy can result in serious negative repercussions. The recent case of Ms. Kate Cox, a wife and mother of two who was carrying a fetus with conditions incompatible with life, was a wake-up call for all Texas women of childbearing age. The pregnancy not only put her own life at stake but threatened her ability to have more children, which she hoped to do. Yet, the state of Texas blocked Ms. Cox's ability to terminate her unviable pregnancy, forcing her to go out of state for medical care.

Governor Abbott and Attorney General Paxton believe that they – and not highly trained doctors – have the right to determine whether Ms. Cox and other pregnant women in similar life-threatening or dangerous situations who are carrying an unviable fetus can receive the medical care they desperately need. This way of thinking is barbaric and outdated – and it means women do not have the same say in their medical care as men.

A comprehensive approach to women's health care also should include access to affordable birth control, high-quality prenatal and maternity care, and screenings for cervical and breast cancer. In addition, age-appropriate sex education should be available throughout a woman's lifetime.

Unfortunately, women in District 32 have a high rate of maternal vulnerability, meaning they are at risk of having complications and even dying during or after pregnancy, according to the March of Dimes. The maternal vulnerability index for women of color is especially high. We must do more to support new mothers, including breastfeeding support and consistent wellness checkups throughout the first two years after birth.

Women should have access to comprehensive health care throughout their lives, should have the right to make their own decisions about that care, and should receive the support they need no matter their decisions.