

# Guest Commentary: I waited until I knew for sure my pregnancy was not viable — and for that my state’s abortion ban dehumanized me

By **LEAH HUFF** | Guest Commentary

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I have wanted to be a mother more deeply than I’ve wanted anything in life. I was willing to risk my own health, months of pain, and the likelihood I would lose my eyesight, for a child.

I wish I could tell you I had a happy, healthy pregnancy with no complications. But that’s not how life worked out for me. Instead, because I live in a state that denies women access to abortion care later in pregnancy, once I hit the 22-week mark, I was treated as less than a person.

Abortion bans, like Proposition 115, are punitive and cruel. They cause stigmatization and victimization for women. The people behind abortion bans pretend women in my situation don’t exist — that our experiences are hypotheticals. I’m here to tell you that’s not true. One-size-fits-all bans, like Proposition 115, have devastating consequences for pregnant women like me, who have serious health conditions amidst a high-risk pregnancy.

Even before getting pregnant, I saw a high-risk specialist. I suffer from Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension, which means cerebral spinal fluid around my brain and spinal cord builds up and puts severe pressure on my brain and optic nerves. I was prescribed Diamox, a medication that prevented me from having neurosurgery, and saved me from going blind.

While there was little research on the effect of Diamox on pregnancy, my OB’s number one concern at the start of my pregnancy was my health, and we decided I should remain on medication during the pregnancy.

From the first trimester, there were warning signs something was wrong. I didn’t have enough amniotic fluid, the gestational sac was small, and then at 16-weeks, my blood test came back barely above the threshold for neural tube defects. But my specialist told me everything looked fine, and I had a healthy pregnancy.

I couldn’t shake the feeling the low amniotic fluid was a warning sign. At my high-risk fetal anatomy scan, I had a dangerously low amount of amniotic fluid, which made it impossible for the doctor to see the baby. I would need more testing and time to know if the low amniotic fluid would lead to a lethal fetal diagnosis. That was at 21 weeks and 3 days.

At that point, I had 72 hours under Iowa law to make the life-changing decision whether or not to end my pregnancy. I chose to continue the pregnancy and discontinue my medication, risking the real possibility of brain surgery to prevent blindness and brain swelling — while pregnant.

At 24 weeks and 3 days, a fetal ultrasound confirmed my baby had multiple heart defects, a skull bone abnormality, and hemivertebrae, a rare congenital spine malformation. I heard the doctor speak my worst fear: my pregnancy was incompatible with life.

I would have lost my eyesight and my pregnancy was not viable, but the doctors in Iowa refused to help me. Even though Iowa law allows abortion after 22 weeks in “cases of life or severely compromised physical health,” not one doctor was willing to perform an abortion. They didn’t care if I went blind — at least I wouldn’t be dead. My health and quality of life no longer mattered.

At that point, the only help I received from doctors in Iowa was a brochure for the Boulder Abortion Clinic. Sick, heartbroken, and terrified, I flew to Colorado to seek the medical care I was denied in my home state. I was treated with compassion and dignity — a stark contrast from the doctors in Iowa.

In my mind, I keep revisiting those 72 hours when I didn’t think about my eyesight; I didn’t think about my physical pain. I thought about my child. I don’t know if I will ever become a mother, but at that moment, I made the most motherly decision of my life. I waited until I knew for sure my pregnancy was not viable — and for that my state dehumanized me. This is exactly what Proposition 115 will do to women in Colorado.

Proposition 115 will force women to make the most personal medical decisions on an arbitrary timeline, with no consideration for their individual circumstances. Women’s health and pregnancy complications are anything but black and white. They are complex and deserve compassion. Proposition 115 is even more extreme than the Iowa law that prevented me from getting the care I needed. There are no exceptions for risks to a woman’s health, a lethal fetal diagnosis, or even in cases of rape.

Regardless of how any of us feel about abortion at different points in pregnancy, I hope Colorado voters will reach within their own hearts and be guided by their own moral compass. This was certainly not the story I wanted to tell. But you never know whose story it could be. I hope you’ll carry my story with you, and vote “No” on Proposition 115.

*Leah Huff sought abortion care with Dr. Hern and his staff at the Boulder Abortion Clinic in Colorado last spring after being denied care in her home state of Iowa.*