

Guest Commentary: Proposition 115 Limiting Abortion Care in Colorado Would Impact People Like Me

By Erika Christensen Guest Commentary The Denver Post October 27, 2020

This November, Coloradans are being asked to close a door I was grateful to walk through four years ago. The intentionally confusing Proposition 115 would make it illegal for Colorado's abortion providers to administer abortion care after 22 weeks, with no regard for the consequences. This would not only dictate important health decisions for Coloradans, it would also affect people like me who travel to Colorado after they are denied care in their home states.

Proponents of Prop 115 are trying to sell this ban as a "reasonable compromise." But there is nothing reasonable about an abortion ban for someone seeking abortion care.



Erika Christensen is a later abortion patient advocate who lives with her family in New York.
(Photo provided by Erika Christensen)

Abortion is so common we can be sure everyone loves someone who had an abortion. However, because the majority of abortions happen early in pregnancy, most Coloradans are unlikely to have personal experience with the care they're being asked to criminalize. So I can understand why many Coloradans may be wondering, "If the ban prevents care after 22 weeks, why would she wait so long?"

In fact, we don't wait. We get to our care as soon as we are able.

A year into marriage, my husband Garin and I were thrilled to set ourselves upon the path to parenthood. But after my first pregnancy ended in miscarriage, our enthusiasm dimmed to cautious optimism. My second pregnancy was healthy - until it wasn't. Garin and I talked about our options with my doctor and decided ending the pregnancy was the safest option for me and for our family.

But then we learned I could not receive abortion care from my doctor at our regular hospital because I was past our state's gestational limit, a ban not unlike Prop 115.

My doctor recommended I seek care from Dr. Warren Hern, an abortion provider in Colorado who specializes in complicated cases like mine. We quickly booked last minute flights to Denver, a hotel room and a rental car to drive to Boulder.

Once we walked through the doors of the Boulder Abortion Clinic, we were treated with care, compassion and respect by Dr. Hern and clinic staff. I found myself strangely surprised by every kind, thoughtful gesture. I realized that, despite having family members and close friends who'd had abortions, I'd never known anyone who had sought care later in pregnancy. So where had my misconceptions come from?

After I was back home, I felt incredibly sad because I'd wished my pregnancy had turned out differently, but I also felt relieved and grateful for having been cared for by Dr. Hern. If it sounds complicated, it's because it is.

Like me, later abortion seekers tend to find out critical information later in their pregnancy, including that they're pregnant. Later discovery of pregnancy, or "cryptic pregnancy," is surprisingly common, affecting an estimated 1 in 475 women. Many assume they cannot be pregnant because they're on birth control, have been told they have infertility or have recently been pregnant. Most are shocked when they find out they're pregnant and if it's a pregnancy they cannot continue, they rush to access abortion care as quickly as they can.

However, further into pregnancy, the cost of abortion care goes up, the number of providers goes down and more and more restrictions go into effect. The human body does not follow legal timelines and that is often a lesson we learn the hard way.

Shockingly I found out about my third pregnancy when I was already in the second trimester. Having three pregnancies so close together had taken a toll on my health and I hadn't experienced symptoms beyond the nausea I'd felt for literally a year and a half by that point. Since I was actively trying to parent, we were thrilled to continue the pregnancy and now have a precocious toddler. If I hadn't been able to get safe care when I did, I'm not sure my family would exist like it does today.

People who have abortions do not want or need our personal experiences to be politicized. Yet politics - and not what is best for our health or our families - are often the determining factor when we are delayed or denied care. Then we bear the brunt of the consequences without support from the same politicians who spend their entire careers stigmatizing us and the doctors who care for us. So when I hear proponents of Prop 115 say that abortion bans are reasonable, I have to ask reasonable for whom?

That's why I'm asking Coloradans to Vote No on Proposition 115. Vote No to keep politics out of reproductive healthcare. But more importantly, Vote No to acknowledge that our bodies, and our lives, are profoundly complicated. A blunt, unsympathetic law will never account for that complexity.