



## Remarks to New Orleans City Council

June 6, 2019

by Michelle Erenberg

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and I applaud Council President Moreno and Vice President Williams for introducing this resolution to condemn this law and for recognizing the dangerous impact this abortion ban will have on people in our community.

I am Michelle Erenberg, the co-founder and Executive Director of Lift Louisiana, an organization educating, advocating and litigating for reproductive rights.

We have been at the legislature every week testifying and educating lawmakers about this law. We were there for every hearing, every debate. We have seen a groundswell of public attention and outrage about this law and the lawmakers who are determined to control women's bodies and outlaw abortion. People are asking, how did we get here? The truth is, this terrifying moment has been developing for decades. This is how we got here.

In the last 2 decades, dozens of laws making abortions more difficult to access have passed in Louisiana. During this time, four abortion clinics closed in Louisiana, then two more, then two more.

Medical schools stopped teaching future doctors how to perform abortions, creating a shortage of physicians able to provide comprehensive reproductive healthcare services.

Activists and anti-abortion lawmakers have used more inflammatory language – asserting doctors and clinic employees are criminals, not caregivers. The few remaining physicians that do provide abortions in Louisiana have been demonized by these lawmakers. They then used this characterization to justify passing more laws and regulations – to protect women's health of course.

Congress passed and reauthorized the Hyde amendment which bars poor women from using their public insurance to pay for an abortion. Louisiana doubled down, prohibiting any state funding for abortions and passing laws that would prevent Medicaid patients from receiving any healthcare, not just abortion care, from Planned Parenthood.

Judges, on a mission to end the right to abortion and to sanction religious discrimination against birth control and LGBTQ people, were appointed (for life) to federal courts. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Louisiana's law requiring doctors providing abortions to have hospital



admitting privileges, blatantly ignoring the Supreme Court's ruling two years ago which struck down the exact same law in Texas.

In the last two decades, religious extremists have implemented an organized and well-funded attack on women's freedom. This is not about women's health; it is not about protecting life. It is about whether people who are or can become pregnant are human beings deserving rights. So now this is where we are. We live in a state where a woman seeking an abortion has to visit a clinic twice and wait twenty-four hours to "reflect" on her decision. She has to have an ultrasound and listen while a description is read to her. She has listen as a her doctor is forced to recite mis-information, provided by the state, about the risks of abortion (which are, of course, tiny compared to childbirth). She has to scrounge to find the money to pay for the abortion in a state where one-fifth of women live in poverty, where they refuse to raise the minimum wage above \$7.25 and where public or private insurance for this healthcare procedure is prohibited. She has to search desperately for someone to care for her children in a state which fails to provide quality, and adequately funded, childcare to mothers. She has to suffer lost wages in a state that refuses to provide paid medical leave.

Our legislature could have funded childcare this session, they could have passed the Paid Family Leave Act, they could have voted to put the minimum wage increase on the ballot. But they didn't, none of those bills passed. Instead they passed three new laws targeting abortion clinics with even more regulations. Instead they voted to prohibit people from getting an abortion, even in cases of rape and incest, before most women even know they are pregnant.

While we commend this City Council for making this statement today – for asserting that it trusts women to make decisions about their lives and their bodies – we all must recognize how imperiled abortion access is here and across the state. We are one bad court decision away from the last remaining clinic in New Orleans closing its doors for good. We urge this Council and the citizens of New Orleans to channel this energy, this anger, this fear into becoming more active on this issue. To VOTE on this issue. An amendment to ban abortions in the Louisiana constitutional will be on the ballot in 2020. We must challenge it!

We can do better, we must do better, not only for the people of this city – but for all the people in Louisiana. And we need to start NOW, because the anti-abortion extremists have had a 20-year head start.