



Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

**Testimony in Support of 26-H 7357,  
AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND GENDER-AFFIRMING HEALTHCARE DATA PRIVACY ACT  
House Committee on Judiciary  
Hannah Stern - Director, Public Policy and Government Relations  
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England  
March 10, 2026**

Dear Chair McEntee and honorable members of the House Committee on Judiciary:

In my capacity as the Director, Public Policy and Government Relations at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE), I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony **in support of House Bill H 7357**. PPSNE provided sexual and reproductive health care to nearly 10,000 Rhode Island patients last year and believes all people should have access to quality, affordable, and compassionate health care as a basic human right — regardless of who you are, where you live, your income, if you have health insurance or your immigration status.

Following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the United States Supreme Court in 2022, the need for lawmakers to protect sensitive consumer health data related to reproductive and gender-affirming health care has never been more urgent. Through the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision, the privacy landscape was fundamentally changed on a national scale, and an ongoing escalation of attacks on access to reproductive and gender-affirming health care was accelerated.

Many consumers – including Rhode Island residents – are likely unaware that a variety of sensitive health information and data are completely unprotected by federal or state law. While the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protects personally identifiable health information that is collected by health care providers, any entities not covered by HIPAA face no such requirement to keep information related to a person’s health or medical situations confidential. In reality, entities such as fitness apps, period trackers, websites, retailers, employers, and other entities that do not fall under HIPAA have the capacity to accrue just as personal and sensitive information as health care

providers; however, they can also lawfully collect, share, and sell this medical information, including information about diagnoses, treatments, and medical history, along with a consumer's other data. Without explicit protections for this sensitive data, consumers are left vulnerable to medical information being transferred or used without their consent and for unethical purposes.

PPSNE is grateful for the Rhode Island General Assembly's ongoing commitment and action to protect and expand reproductive freedom. While abortion and gender-affirming health care are legal and statutorily protected in Rhode Island, we are not immune to the efforts of the global anti-abortion movement to restrict or deny access to pregnancy-related care. H 7357 will support the promise that Rhode Island has made to act as a safe harbor for our residents and to those who seek legal health care within the boundaries of our state. This legislation is an essential piece of policy to follow the Healthcare Provider Shield Act of 2024; the Equality in Abortion Coverage Act of 2023; and the Reproductive Privacy Act of 2019. As patients seek to exercise their bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom under the statutes that this General Assembly has worked so hard to pass, privacy must remain a central, essential, and non-negotiable component of this access.

Data collection, surveillance, and privacy abuses already disproportionately target and impact populations such as the undocumented community; Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities; and lower income communities. With bans or severe restrictions on abortion care in 20 states, and bans on gender-affirming care in 25 states, the *Dobbs* decision has ushered in an era where data shared between companies, private parties, and the government is being used to surveil, penalize, target, and harass individuals who are accessing health care and relying on their support networks.

This concern is not existential – presumed-private conversations via social media, text messaging, and other digital communication platforms have already been weaponized to criminalize and harm patients seeking abortion health care and their support networks. In 2017, for example, an online search for misoprostol – one of the two medications most commonly prescribed for medication abortion – was used to charge one woman with second-degree murder.<sup>1</sup> In 2022, Facebook provided direct messages between a Nebraska mother and daughter to the police and aided prosecution for their seeking of abortion care.<sup>2</sup> And, in 2023, a Texas man filed a wrongful death lawsuit against three women who

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fastcompany.com/90468030/how-an-online-search-for-abortion-pills-landed-this-woman-in-jail>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2022/08/12/1117092169/nebraska-cops-used-facebook-messages-to-investigate-an-alleged-illegal-abortion>

allegedly assisted his ex-wife in obtaining medication abortion pills, and included screenshots of their private messages in the lawsuit.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time as ensuring that unbridled access to sensitive messages is not permitted under law, this legislation is critical to address ongoing practices by anti-abortion limited-service pregnancy centers that put pregnant people at risk of harm. These centers, also referred to as “crisis pregnancy centers” or CPCs, typically present as medical providers but are unlicensed for true pregnancy care, and thus are exempt from both the same oversight and regulation that legitimate medical providers are and from HIPAA protections. Pregnant individuals sometimes contact or visit a CPC looking for reproductive health care services, only to find that they cannot receive an abortion at that facility. However, while the individual is at the CPC, no laws prevent the CPC from collecting and sharing sensitive information about the individual with anti-abortion groups, who can then target the pregnant person with anti-abortion messaging and political ads.

In fact, coordinated and targeted data collection and exploitation have elevated the role of CPCs within the broader anti-abortion network. Evidence has surfaced that CPCs are widely sharing visitor data with their thousands of volunteers and, in at least one case, the general public. *Abortion, Every Day* reported that Heartbeat International – the country’s largest network of CPCs – has been collecting and sharing CPC visitors’ health data with corporate employees, thousands of center trainees, and, in one instance, publicly on the internet.<sup>4</sup> Ensuring the privacy of sensitive health information and data should be the guaranteed reality for all individuals seeking comprehensive reproductive health and gender-affirming health care – however, the practices of CPCs are simply representative of the standard practice for a policy issue left unregulated for far too long.

All people – no matter where they live – should be able to make personal health decisions and access health care with privacy, safety, and security. In our post-*Roe* landscape, strengthening confidentiality protections for reproductive health and gender-affirming health care is urgent. The *Dobbs* decision changed the privacy landscape and encouraged the weakening of data privacy practices surrounding sensitive health information. It is our responsibility to continue to protect patients who are seeking legally protected health care in Rhode Island. For these reasons, we strongly support H 7357.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/11/1162805773/texas-man-sues-abortion-pills>

<sup>4</sup> [https://jessica.substack.com/p/exclusive-health-data-breach-at-americas?utm\\_source=post-email-title&publication\\_id=11153&post\\_id=145131741&utm\\_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=1o4v6y&triedRedirect=true&utm\\_medium=email](https://jessica.substack.com/p/exclusive-health-data-breach-at-americas?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=11153&post_id=145131741&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=1o4v6y&triedRedirect=true&utm_medium=email)

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'H Stern'.

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