

Joint Senate Judiciary and House Federal and State Affairs Committee on
The Value Them Both Constitutional Amendment

Ann Marie Alvey
Director, Project Rachel & Project Joseph
Kansas City, KS

Chairmen Wilborn and Barker, members of the Committee, my name is Ann Marie Alvey and I am the Director of a post-abortion healing ministry for women and men called Project Rachel & Project Joseph. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you in support of the "Value Them Both" Constitutional Amendment for Life.

I would like to share with you my unique perspective on the issue of the "right to abortion" recently found in the Kansas State Constitution. As a citizen of Kansas I am grateful for the opportunity to express my viewpoint, as well as let you know that I would like to exercise my right to vote on an issue that impacts all women in this state.

As I mentioned, I work in a ministry that helps people, mostly women, heal from a past abortion or abortions. I am here to give voice to those who don't have one in the public forum, those who can't speak up for themselves because they experience so much fear, guilt, regret and shame for a choice they made, often decades prior to coming to see me.

I have worked in this ministry for 1 ½ years and my eyes have been opened to a reality I was previously unaware of. I have come to realize that there are two victims in an abortion, the child and the mother, and my heart breaks for women who are suffering, oftentimes for decades, due to an irreversible choice they made most often in their youth. I have seen women in their 20's up to their 70's; those whose abortions were recent to those who have suffered for decades. I've gotten a call from as far away as Florida and an email request for help from a woman in South America. One man called recently from out of state, and I was able to recommend our online healing program. He is now married with two children and had no idea why all of a sudden he was having deep regret for an event that happened when he was a young adult, which he had not consciously thought about in years. My most recent client is a mother who gave permission for her 16yr. old daughter to have an abortion, 40yrs. ago. She has been suffering ever since from regret for *her* choice.

In my time in this ministry, I have worked with women who freely chose abortion, those who were supported in their choice by family or friends, those who had no support or guidance and those who were pressured or coerced. The common denominator I've heard in *all* of their stories is regret, guilt and shame, whether their choice was free or not. Abortion deeply impacts women because they have a biological connection to the child they are carrying, they have severed that physiological bond and they can't turn back the clock. Once the choice is made, it is permanent.

Often after an abortion there is instant relief. Whatever crisis a woman was experiencing has been solved. Women are told it's better this way; now they can get on with their lives. And most do, some

with more success than others. It's what they carry on the inside, that no one sees, that tells a whole different story. The women I've seen have never talked about their abortions to anyone, even those closest to them. It's the elephant in the room. That makes their suffering even harder, because it is done in silence. Women feel isolated and imprisoned by their pain. The world says it's okay, it's a good choice, you should feel proud. And when they don't, it compounds their suffering because they think there must be something wrong with them for feeling different. So women do what we all do when something is too hard to deal with – they cope, and there are many ways to do this.

One common way to cope is to **repress** any uncomfortable feelings that may come to the surface. Unfortunately when guilt or sorrow is repressed, so are vulnerability, tenderness and intimacy. Women's emotional lives and relationships suffer. **Suppression** is another coping mechanism. Women put thoughts of the abortion out of their minds. One way to do this is to keep constantly busy so they don't have to think about it. Unfortunately a trigger can bring back memories of the abortion. It could be a smell, a sound, a feeling or sensation, a flashback, a dream, the anniversary date of the abortion, the due date of the baby, or even another pregnancy. These come without warning. **Rationalization** is another common way women cope. Many women feel a need to justify their decision in order to feel okay about their choice. **Denial**, of feelings, thoughts and the physiological bond a woman has with her baby is also very common. These coping mechanisms work for a while, sometimes many years. But unfortunately this takes a toll on women's mental health. Depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares and eating disorders are seen in post-abortive women. These are symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Many women self-medicate in order to cope with the pain. Alcohol use/abuse has been known to increase 110%, and marijuana use/abuse 220% for post-abortive women. Suicidal behaviors are known to increase by 155%; for teens the risk is even greater. And the sad fact is that most women have no idea that this could happen to them as a result of their abortion, nor do many even link their symptoms to this traumatic event in their lives. No one tells them that this is a possibility. *That is not informed consent.*

In my research, I was shocked to learn that 64% of abortions involved coercion. I checked that percentage against the clients I have seen and sadly, found it to be true. Coercion can turn to violence if the woman resists. I was astounded to learn that the leading cause of death for pregnant women is not complications from childbirth or even an abortion, but murder! Over half the women in this country are not choosing their abortions freely; someone else is choosing it for them, often with life threatening implications. Women aren't the only ones invested in whether she carries her pregnancy to term or not, so are the fathers of those children, as well as the woman's family members.

To say that abortion is a woman's "right" only emboldens those who have a personal interest in terminating her pregnancy: parents, boyfriends, abusive boyfriends, husbands, sex-traffickers and perpetrators of rape or incest. For women who are coerced in any way, to call it a "right" further victimizes them. That right will be used as a justification to force some women to do what is against their will. How is that right?

There's a temptation to claim that I've cited extreme cases, or that women who suffer from their abortions are only a small minority and "why should we base a "right" on a small number of women's experiences?" I don't believe the numbers are small. I believe we don't hear from more of these women because they are too afraid of being judged and they don't believe anyone can have compassion for them. Where is the public voice of compassion for the mother? It isn't there.

People can argue numbers, but I'm not dealing with numbers. I'm dealing with women who are breaking under the weight of their choice. To discount *any* woman's experience is to ignore, invalidate or minimize her suffering. That's discrimination. A right does not discriminate. It is there to support what is good for *all*. Calling abortion a "right" is not good for *all* women.

I am not here to propose taking "choice" away from women. What concerns me most is women's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. I've had two clients tell me of excessive bleeding over a month after their abortions, who were grateful they got to the ER in time. An incomplete abortion was the cause in both cases. That's not good health care. Had my clients not gone to the ER they would have died. I discovered that abortion clinics don't use ultrasound guided abortions because it takes too much time, and time is money. They only use the ultrasound to determine the size of the baby so they can calculate the type of abortion needed and the cost. And they don't show the woman the screen, which I find telling. I have witnessed the mental, emotional and spiritual suffering firsthand. None of my clients said they were counseled before their procedure. None were told of the many possible physical risks of abortion, or the adverse mental, emotional or spiritual consequences of this choice. Most women who seek abortions are in an unplanned pregnancy, and fear is the factor driving their decision. For something that has such a profound effect on the lives of millions of women, I believe they have a **right** to be well-informed about what could happen to them if they make this choice. This is the "right" we should be fighting for, women and men alike, because it is for the good of *all* women, not just some. Thank you.

Below are some websites for further information, if you are interested:

My website: www.projectrachelkc.com

www.TheUnChoice.com

www.AfterAbortion.org

www.smartwomenshealthcare.com

www.hushfilm.com

www.herchoicetoheal.com

Complications: Abortion's Impact on Women. The deVeber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research
Angela Lanfranchi, Ian Gentes, Eliabeth Ring-Cassidy. Latest Worldwide, evidence-based, Scientific
Studies and Research. Available in book or digital form on Amazon.com

