

Members of House Federal and State Affairs and the Senate Judiciary Committees,

I ask you to vote no on CR 5019/SCR1613, the constitutional amendment that denies the right to reproductive freedom in the Kansas Constitution. This not only pre-empts a personal, private medical decision and makes it subject to governmental intrusion, it also denies the equal rights of women in the Kansas Bill of Rights.

While I've always supported the right to abortion, I really only thought about it an extreme "what if" scenario, such as cases of abuse or poverty. When I found myself pregnant at 19, about to start my sophomore year of college, it all became very real.

I spent a few weeks that summer worried about my future. I knew I wasn't emotionally ready to be a parent. I briefly considered adoption, but I knew childbirth would derail my future and it wasn't a medical risk I was willing to take.

I had a surgical abortion at 12 weeks and I know to my core that it was the absolute best decision I could make for me and for my life.

I am so grateful I was able to control my body, my life, and my destiny. I'm glad I'm not tethered to a man I could not build a life with. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life co-parenting with someone who I was ultimately not compatible with and who was also not ready to be a parent. Though the decision was hard, the process was smooth and compassionate – the way health care should be (and please remember, abortion is health care). Dr. Nauser made me feel comforted and cared for the entire time.

I wish I had understood contraception better at the time, and that my Kansas high school had done a better job presenting the options. I had no idea how the pill really worked. I wasn't on it. We used a condom that showed absolutely no signs of breaking or failing, and I trusted that the condom would be enough.

I firmly believe that anyone should be able to get an abortion in any circumstances. But I don't think many people are aware of how easy or common it is for contraception to fail even in the best circumstances.

I don't regret anything about my abortion and I feel nothing but relief. I'm 34 now, and I have had years to grow as a person, years to truly become the best version of myself. If my husband and I choose to have children, I will be able to support them because I am ready to be a parent.

Sometimes, terminating a pregnancy is the best option. There is no shame in that. It's critically important that abortion remains a safe and accessible procedure. I can't begin to count the number of women who, after finding out I had an abortion, share they had one as well. When people spread ignorance about abortion, it's personal – they're talking about me and women I care dearly about.

The truth is, no matter if I had chosen abortion, adoption, or parenting, my life probably would have turned out okay. But that's not the point. We women are so damn resilient that sometimes it backfires; our superpower is in ability to make do in nearly any situation is often at the expense of our own wants and needs. Yeah, I probably could have made do and had an okay life if I had chosen to continue my pregnancy. But I didn't want to.

I am proud of my abortion because I made the right call for my life, my future, and frankly, for that pregnancy. I did what was right, and I don't feel shame or guilt. Instead, I feel empowered that I had the ability to make this choice and make build my family on my terms.

Sincerely,
Mandy Stark Culbertson
Overland Park, KS