

Testimony Before The Illinois House "Economic Justice & Equity Committee"
By Terry Cosgrove
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Good Afternoon, my name is Terry Cosgrove and I'm honored to appear before this committee today.

I have an academic background in the area of economic justice and equity as it pertains to gender discrimination and the treatment of women as second class citizens. I received my two Masters Degrees from the University of Illinois. The first is an MSW from the Jane Addams School of Social Work where I focused on public policy and its impact on reproductive rights. The title of that 1980 Master's thesis was: "Abortion and Indigent Women: A Policy Analysis."

My second Master's degree is in Labor & Industrial Relations where my thesis work examined the policy implications of equal pay disparities between men and women. Specifically, when talented and qualified women are excluded from full participation in the labor market, mediocre or less talented men fill positions. The result is more talented women than these men, if allowed to compete equally, would increase productivity and efficiency across all economic sectors. I used the University of Illinois itself as my model. Defending this thesis in front of a committee of white men was, as you might imagine, challenging, but nonetheless successful.

As an academic who believes in science, research and facts to guide public policy, it is disturbing to recognize that too often, public policy is not based on these principles. Rather, public policy is often dictated by narrowly-held, deeply personal religious beliefs that do not belong in the legal or policy arena, especially given the Constitutionally-mandated separation of church and state. This is especially true because those beliefs and institutions historically treat women as less than equal.

On a related note, one would hope that when an elected official makes a written promise as a candidate, that promise would be upheld and acted upon once elected to the office he or she attains.

We know that when women who give birth are allowed to choose the timing and spacing of their pregnancies, the outcomes for women, their children and their families are greatly enhanced in innumerable ways, including healthier pregnancies leading to healthier birth outcomes for both babies and mothers, lower maternal complication rates including maternal deaths, fewer complications for babies, women's higher educational attainment, greater economic prosperity, etc. An unmarried 15 year-old who gives birth has less than a 1/3 of 1% chance of getting a four year college degree.

The data shows that Illinois and every other state benefits from these outcomes because every dollar that is invested in family planning saves four dollars.

In light of these well documented facts, why do we insist on making it as difficult as possible for women to time and space their pregnancies?

The answer to this question is clear and simple: race and gender discrimination. In a democratic society that calls on us to treat all of its members with dignity and fairness, opponents of equality use the cloak of "moral outrage" to discriminate against women and to refuse to recognize what is best for women and children. Is it really any secret that the most democratic countries and institutions in the world treat women better than the most autocratic, authoritarian, male dominated, in many cases to the absolute complete exclusion, of women?

I want to draw your attention to one recent study from Colorado to illustrate my point: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/06/science/colorados-push-against-teenage-pregnancies-is-a-startling-success.html?_r=1 which I am submitting to the committee along with this statement for your official record.

The brief summary of this 2015 study is that over a six year period, a large group of Colorado teenagers and low-income women were offered free access to the birth control of their choice, and they lined up in droves to get it. The teenage birth rate dropped by 40% and the abortion rate by 42%. The results for low-income women without a high school degree were similar. "If we want to reduce poverty, one of the simplest, fastest and cheapest things we could do would be to make sure that as few people as possible become parents before they actually want to," said Elizabeth Sawhill, an economist at the Brookings Institution. A companion program and study to Colorado's took place in St. Louis, Missouri with nearly the same results.

Given a 42% drop in the abortion rate, some of you in this room might be tempted to think that those who claim to champion "life," who are so morally opposed to abortion, call it the "murder" and "slaughter of innocent unborn children," would be so overjoyed by these results that they would do everything they could to promote access to birth control in order to dramatically reduce the need for abortion. Well, you would be wrong, very wrong. According to author and researcher Cristina Page, in her book, *How The Pro-Choice Movement Saved America*, not a single anti-abortion organization in the U.S. supports access to birth control, and the best a few of them can do is say nothing about birth control.

This issue became very personal for me 40 years ago when, beginning in 1977 and continuing for several years, I was working as a tenant counselor in central Illinois, helping low-income women who were being evicted from their apartments for non-payment of rent and unable to pay their gas and electric bills. That same year, Illinois passed a law, sponsored by legislators opposed to legal abortion, that ended Illinois' Medicaid coverage of abortion. Then Republican Governor Jim Thompson vetoed the bill calling it "unfair and cruel" in his fierce opposition to this travesty of justice.

Shortly thereafter, I was part of a group called the "Emergency Abortion Loan Fund" that raised and lent money to desperate low-income women who had to do horrible things in order to obtain a legal abortion. I was a first-hand witness to these horrible things, and that is how I became a pro-choice advocate 40 years ago.

How do I know about these horrible things? I was the volunteer record keeper for the Emergency Abortion Loan Fund (on 3 x 5 index cards, it was the 1970s) and I soon discovered that my clients, who were facing eviction from their homes by day, were the same women who were meeting at night with volunteer counselors at the loan fund begging to borrow \$300 for an abortion. Because of the number of women in need, the most that the Fund could loan any single woman was \$50, \$100, or a little more. If she were a rape victim, we did everything we could to raise the money among friends, held bake sales, anything to provide help beyond the basic loan. Not only were these women not paying their rent, they were often unable to buy food and clothes for their children. Many women resorted to drug deals and other things out of complete desperation.

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Like Governor Thompson, I was outraged by what this law was doing to the most vulnerable and desperate women in our society and our state. I vowed at that moment to never forget the women I saw at my day job and later at night who had to make impossible choices and humiliate themselves in front of strangers to access a common medical procedure that was available to most other women. In fact, over 33% of American women will have an abortion before age 45. I have committed my life to making sure laws that terrorize low-income and young women are repealed.

Back to discrimination as I conclude. From my 1980 MSW thesis:

"The overriding issue which is the nexus of all restrictive abortion policies is discrimination: discrimination based on both gender and economic status. In addition, discrimination is based on race, although this element is usually not openly discussed by advocates of restrictive abortion policies. The Congress, Courts and legislatures have been able to limit the rights of indigent women effectively because poor women are vulnerable; to wit, they are virtually powerless. In a society where being white, male, and financially secure is nearly a guarantee of freedom to exercise full constitutional rights and privileges, indigent women enjoy very few societal benefits."

I believe that every pregnancy need not be planned, but every child deserves to be loved and cared for.

I am much less interested in talking about problems, and much more interested in fixing them and getting results. Let's get to work and make this committee obsolete in our lifetimes, and for all generations to follow.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.

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