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Massachusetts
Senators Elizabeth Warren, Edward Markey

I was not protected by Roe v. Wade. My baby's illness was not discovered until late, well past the 25-week mark – a date that is casually (and irresponsibly) thrown around as a magical moment of “viability” after which there is no federal guarantee for my access to safe and legal abortion care.

My husband and I wanted to grow our family. We had tried before, and I had endured three miscarriages before I finally got pregnant with what appeared to be a healthy baby girl. Yet, at 35 weeks (out of 40), my ultrasound revealed holes in my baby's brain.

They offered me intensive medical care or adoption, “We might be able to arrange an abortion, but we just don't know.” (Dr. Tiller was shot in the face at his church, and thus could not provide my care.)

A neonatal neurologist read my MRI and explained to me that babies like my daughter do not typically live long. She was unlikely to ever talk or walk. My baby would not be able to coordinate swallowing. She would endure frequent seizures.

“Babies like your baby are not often comfortable enough to sleep.” She would suffer instead.

This would kill her. She might be unable to breath. She might drown in her own bodily fluids. She might die of brain damage from seizures. Yet they would not call it “fatal,” so I was not allowed to birth my baby into hospice and let her go naturally. I would be required to insert a feeding tube to keep her alive.

I am a scientist myself, and the idea of using science to extend such a sick baby's life is abhorrent to me. It goes against my deepest values and my most sacred beliefs. I was so desperate that I began to plot dangerous alternatives. I wanted to run away and have my baby far away from any hospital. This was a high-risk birth, and my dying in labor was a real risk. If any person had handed me a slip of paper with an address on it, I would have showed up for a back-alley abortion, no questions asked. I was a mother trying to save her daughter from a fate worse than death. Nothing else mattered.

My husband and I were saved by Dr. Hern, an upstanding physician in Boulder Colorado. He gently laid my baby to rest in my womb with a single injection. It was deeply sad and deeply kind. I birthed my baby, Laurel, whole and still. I miss her still, and I am content knowing that I gave her the gift of peace.

Though Roe v. Wade did not protect my access to care in my 36th week of pregnancy, it did allow Dr. Hern to develop abortion methods that are an order of magnitude safer than live birth. I could easily have been a casualty of unsafe and illegal abortion in 2012, but because a precedent of safe and legal abortion was set, I did not have to be. I was able to live my deepest values and go on to have a healthy baby sister for Elsie and Laurel instead. My living daughters still have their mother. My husband still has his wife. I still have my life, my family, my values, and a heart full of love.