

\*I originally shared this testimony in person on January 15, 2021

Two years ago I was in this same building, standing in front of a committee, telling my story and the impact infertility has had on my life- physically, emotionally, and financially. And here I am again, two years later, doing the exact same thing. In those two years, many things have changed in my life, but there is one thing that has, glaringly, stayed the same- we are still a family of two, plus one fur baby.

Two years ago, I had explained that we had just finished the IVF process, during which we suffered one miscarriage and two complete implantation failures. At the time I spoke, my husband and I were at a crossroads- what do you do after IVF fails? The first step was to pay off the debt we had accumulated in our last several years of fertility treatments. I can happily say we have finally recovered from that financial impact, but it will not last long. After two years off of fertility treatments and a lot of time reflecting on what we want, with the help of our medical providers, we have made the difficult decision of pursuing IVF one more time. This time we will be travelling to Denver for this process; so, on top of the expense of doctor visits, lab work, ultrasounds, medications, and treatments (all of which we have been told will be around \$35,000-\$40,000), we have also added on plane tickets, Airbnbs, and rental cars.

Now, we were moderately lucky the first time around because I had some infertility coverage under an insurance plan I had through my mother. At age 29, I am now on my own insurance and no longer have any type of infertility coverage whatsoever. In fact, our new clinic will not be touching our insurance plan for a single thing; it will all be paid out of pocket. I need to pause here and, again, emphasize that my husband and I are lucky. In the last few years, despite the impact of our first round of IVF, we have found ourselves in a place where we can reasonably pay for a second round. In fact, I often even feel guilt that we can afford this treatment, while other cannot. However, despite that, we still find ourselves turning to our loved ones for any help we can get in order to limit the financial burden of this treatment as much as we can. In fact, my best friend very generously set up a GoFundMe page for us, so that others could donate to help with our travel expenses. I half-joked with my husband that, if we are lucky enough for this to work, we will one day tell our child that we had to crowdfund their life into existence. In my humble opinion, it was a funny joke; but also an extremely sad one. When my friend first brought up the idea of a GoFundMe, I was uncomfortable and unsure if I wanted her to do it. Our pride told us we needed to do this on our own, but our bank account told us that we were about to embark on a very expensive journey and any help at all would be welcome. We have received donations from family, friends, and strangers. Imagine that: strangers are helping us build a family.

Over the years, I have heard and read things about infertility that have not made this journey any easier. Things like, “just relax and you’ll get pregnant,” “maybe this is a sign you aren’t meant to have children,” “just adopt,” “the population is too high anyway, so it’s best that you can’t have children,” or “this is God’s plan for you.” Now, I’ll admit, I am far from a religious person, so I do not view my infertility as a “plan,” I view it for what it is- a medical

condition that stems from my PCOS and Endometriosis, both of which affect my everyday quality of life. And a medical condition that I am fighting with all of my strength to overcome. All I, and others in this community, are asking for is some acknowledgment, some support, and some help. I understand that talking and hearing about reproductive issues, like periods, and discharge, and ovarian cysts, and rupturing fallopian tubes, and miscarriages is probably not that fun. But, if it is difficult to listen about these things, imagine how difficult it is to experience them, especially when you feel alone and your pain dismissed.

After seven years of trying to conceive, this round of IVF will be our last chance at a family larger than two. Whether or not this works, it will be time to move onto our next stage of life. And what that means is that, no matter what happens with the Access to Fertility Care Act, it will not affect me. If fertility coverage finally becomes a requirement in the state of North Dakota, I will never benefit from it. So why am I here? I am here for all of the couples that will come after me; the couples who will be forced to make the decision, just like my husband and I, to risk thousands and thousands of dollars with no guarantee of a happy outcome. I want them to have the best chance they can possibly have at a family and, for many couples, that chance only comes with fertility coverage. And I am here for any future children I may have; children who may inherit my fertility issues and who, one day, may need help giving us grandchildren.

My husband and I have spent the last two years coming to terms with our reality and making plans for a future without children. It will be full of travelling, date nights, happiness, and love; but it will be without first words, first steps, graduations, weddings, and grandchildren. I know that by telling you all my story, I have no doubt garnered your sympathy, which is more than appreciated. But that is not why I am here today. I am here to tell you that infertility affects at least 1 in 8 couples, so you can imagine how many people that may be in your own life. And I am here to tell you that you have the ability to help those people, to lift a financial and emotional burden in their lives, to give them hope, and to give them a chance at bringing life into this world.

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