



**Testimony of Becky Straus, Legislative Director
In Support of HCR 6
House Committee on Human Services and Housing
April 1, 2013**

Chair Tomei and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today in support of HCR 6, a resolution to reaffirm our steadfast commitment in Oregon to women's personal decision making in health care.

Since its founding, the ACLU has recognized that personal privacy and reproductive rights are among our most important constitutional liberties. So much depends on our ability to decide – free from government interference – whether and when to become a parent. With reproductive freedom comes opportunity: the opportunity to obtain a good education, to shape one's economic circumstances, to participate in the democratic process, to find love, to build families, to decide what makes for a good life, and to have the opportunity to live that life.

At the time the ACLU first opened its doors in 1920, most states criminalized birth control and abortion care, and it was a federal crime to distribute birth control information through the U.S. mail. Yet many women still sought birth control and abortions. In its earliest years, for example, the ACLU defended Margaret Sanger and Mary Ware Dennett when officials tried to prevent them from publishing materials and speaking about human sexuality, reproduction, and contraception.¹

The criminal ban on abortion in most states that began in the mid-1800s and lasted until 1973, affected low-income women the most profoundly. Women with greater financial resources could persuade their physicians to quietly perform the procedure, but those who could not afford private care often died from bleeding or infections following procedures performed by unskilled providers or from self-induced abortions carried out in desperation. The ACLU was committed to addressing these unjust and harmful policies in order to ensure that all women could get the reproductive health care they needed.

In 1969, the ACLU of Oregon helped lead the fight to legalize abortion in Oregon with the successful passage of SB 193.

Forty years after the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*, we remain committed to this work and are an active member of Oregon's coalition to ensure that women's rights are protected. In *Roe*, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed that the constitutionally protected right to

¹ *U.S. v. Dennett*, 39 F. 2d 564 (1930)

privacy includes every woman's ability to make her own personal medical decisions, without the interference of government. *Roe v. Wade* prohibits a state from enacting laws that ban abortion prior to 24 weeks gestation and requires any prohibition to make exception for where abortion "is necessary, in appropriate medical judgment, for the preservation of the life or health" of the woman.

Every person should be able to make informed, meaningful decisions about reproduction free from intrusion by the government.

HCR 6 would affirm Oregon's commitment to these fundamental rights and protections. We urge your support.

Thank you for the opportunity to share comments today. Please feel free to be in touch with questions.