

Erika Christensen, Patient Testimony

In 2016 I was well into a complicated pregnancy when my husband and I learned the situation was worse than our doctors had originally assessed.

Given all of the information we now had: about the pregnancy, and also about our lives taking into account my own complicated medical history, we felt confident that ending the pregnancy was the safest and best option for me and for our family.

But soon after the diagnosis, we learned that we would not be able to get an abortion in New York because we were past our state's gestational limit, an imaginary line that had sailed by months before. It took us a minute to understand that the doctor who had helped us up to this point, couldn't anymore. We were also angry at ourselves for not finding out what our state's limits were on abortion until I personally needed one.

Our doctor referred us to an abortion provider in Colorado. We were able to book last minute tickets to Denver, a rental car and a hotel room. We put all of the travel expenses on a credit card. The procedure itself, not covered by my otherwise excellent private health insurance because Colorado is pretty far out of network for a patient in New York, was thousands of dollars we did not have. So my retirement-aged mother took the money out of her 401k.

Once in Colorado, in the office of a skilled physician, I was treated with care, compassion and respect.

It is important to me to communicate that my abortion happened within the best possible circumstances. My husband and I are in a loving, equitable relationship free of abuse or violence. We were in strong agreement about my course of care. We speak English, we are U.S. citizens. We are able-bodied and do not have medical conditions that would make long distance travel impossible. We did not have children at home at the time of my abortion who needed to be cared for while we traveled. And again, most importantly, money made my care possible. I often think about what we would have done had just one of these circumstances not been in place.

What happens in Colorado not only impacts Americans across the country who need care when our states turn us away. It will for sure disproportionately impact the most underserved citizens of Colorado, many of whom will be unable to navigate restrictions like I did.

There is an inherent shame to the law deciding what we can do with our bodies. To be turned away by a healthcare provider. To travel far away from home when you're going through a health crisis that is also an emotional crisis.

Not only must Colorado keep politics out of healthcare for Americans turned away from their own states like me, Colorado must keep politics out of healthcare for its own citizens who, unless access is protected, will also be forced to travel out of state for care. Or at least the lucky ones will.