In the state of Massachusetts, a young pregnant woman may be faced with a difficult decision regarding abortion. If a pregnant minor decides to follow through with the safe and legal medical procedure, she may still face obstacles in the form of governmental intrusion and parental restrictions. Current law states that a minor may have an abortion only if she gets the written consent of a parent or permission from a judge. This bill seeks to address is the limits imposed on young women who seek abortions. It would allow for other family members, authorized medical professionals, and the courts to provide consent. This bill also seeks to adjust the age that requires consent from under eighteen years of age to under sixteen years of age.

The Bill
H.2070: An Act to improve healthcare for young women

Elevator Speech
My name is [________] this is [_______] and we are students at Brandeis University. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us, because we know that through responsible planning we can ensure that young women have the same opportunity as their peers. In Massachusetts, 39 out of every 1,000 young women experience unintended pregnancies yearly. As young women, we know this puts these individuals in a position that changes the trajectory of their lives. A pregnancy impacts many areas of life, most notably, a woman's educational and financial well-being.

In MA, young women may find that terminating their pregnancy is in the best interest of themselves and their unborn child but they encounter several obstacles when terminating an unintended pregnancy. Women under 18 must get consent from their parents before they can proceed. For most, this is easy to obtain. However, some young women come from unstable or violent homes, making consent not readily available. Their only option is going through the court system, which is daunting and unnecessary. Of the 20,000 young women who have ever gone through the court for consent only 2 were rejected. Going through the courts is both unnecessary and a waste of taxpayer money.
We want to expand consent options for young women which is why we support bill H.2070: An Act to Improve Health Care for Young Women. This bill gives young women 16 and older the ability to consent to terminating their pregnancy. Additionally, women under the age of 16 would be able to get consent from parents or a family member 25 years old or older. They may also get consent from a licensed medical professional who has counseled them on their pregnancy.

By voting this bill favorably out of Public Health committee, you are helping vulnerable young women maintain stable lives, as well as making sure all young women possess the opportunity to pursue their goals.

Letter to the Legislator

We, Megi Belegu and Asisa Isack, are students at Brandeis University. We are reaching out to you because we live in Waltham and want to ensure that all young women in Massachusetts have equal opportunities. Your past work on the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities indicates a concern for issues that affect minors. Additionally, your support of bill S.1114 highlights your interest in providing equal access to healthcare for all individuals.

In the United States, 39 out of every 1,000 young women experience unintended pregnancies yearly. As young women, we know this puts these individuals in a position that changes the trajectory of their lives. A pregnancy impacts many areas of life, most notably, a woman's educational and financial well-being.

Currently, women under the age of 18 encounter obstacles when terminating an unintended pregnancy. They must get consent from their parents before they can proceed in accessing healthcare. For most young women, this is easy to obtain. In states without laws requiring parental consent, studies have found that young women voluntarily go to their parents for support. However, the same studies show that for young women who do not turn to their families, most have good reason not to. Some come from unstable homes that can be filled with sexual, drug, or domestic abuse, making consent not readily available.

The only option for this group of women is going through the court system. Over the past two decades, over 20,000 young women have gone to the courts seeking consent—only 2 have ever been rejected. Going through the court not only delays access to time sensitive health care, but is a waste of taxpayer money.

We want to expand consent options for young women which is why we support bill H.2070: An Act to Improve Health Care for Young Women. This bill lowers the age of consent to 16 years of age. Women under the age of 16 would still need consent from a third party, but would be able to get consent from a family member 25 years old or older. They would also be able to get consent from a licensed medical professional who has counseled them on their pregnancy.

Individuals from right-to-life organizations may feel that allowing these women to have more options will further increase abortion rates. This is simply not supported by any data; States without parental consent laws don't see increased rates of pregnancies. But there are increased rates of women fleeing to other states to get around parental consent laws. Even if a young woman chooses adoption, that child would struggle in the underfunded DCF system which has seen numerous tragedies in recent years. We can all agree that teenage mothers are not able to fully support a child and should not be put in a position where they may be forced to do so.

H.2070 is still being debated in the Public Health Committee and we ask that you talk to your colleagues and ask them to vote the bill out favorably. By asking your colleagues to vote this bill out of committee, you are helping vulnerable young women maintain stable lives, as well as making sure all young women possess the opportunity to pursue their goals.

House Ways and Means Script

Our names are (insert names) and we are students at Brandeis University. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We know that through responsible planning we can ensure that young women have the same opportunities as their peers. In Massachusetts, 39 out of every 1,000 young women experience unintended pregnancies yearly. As young women, we know this puts these individuals in a position that changes the trajectory of their lives. A pregnancy impacts many areas of life, most notably, a woman's educational and financial well-being.

In MA, women under the age of 18 encounter several obstacles when terminating an unintended pregnancy. Women under 18 must get consent from their parents before they can proceed. For most, this is easy to obtain. In states without laws requiring parental consent, the American Civil Liberties Union found that most young women voluntarily go to their parents for support. The ACLU found that "90% of minors under 15 involved a parent in their decision to have an abortion." This clearly demonstrates that the plurality of young women will most likely turn to their parents for support if they find themselves in an unintended pregnancy.
However, the same studies show that for young women who do not turn to their families, most have good reason not to. Our bill targets those young women who come from unstable homes that can be filled with sexual, drug, or domestic abuse, making consent not readily available. These individuals are left with only the option of going through the court system, which is daunting and unnecessary. We know that if we were to have had to navigate the courts while pregnant, 16, and unsupported, we would have struggled. The struggles we would have faced would have been unnecessary because only 2 out of over 20,000 young women who have ever gone to the court for consent were rejected. This option not only delays access to time sensitive health care, but is a waste of taxpayer money.

We want to reduce the amount that MA spends on court fees with fewer unnecessary cases. When a minor goes to court to get consent under the current statute, she can be assigned a lawyer by the state to protect her interests and guide her through the process. This is hours and hours that can be better spent on helping other indigent people, given the limited funding available for public defenders and the Committee for Public Counsel Services. Over 18 million dollars in the budget last year was appropriated for “Indigent Persons Fees and Court Costs.” This year, Gov. Baker proposes to slash that budget to about 15 million, meaning resources will become even more scarce. We must find ways to cut costs in judiciary funding if we want to cut spending. There are people who desperately rely on public defenders in order to get a fair trial. To ensure justice is being served in the state of MA, we must ensure that the limited funding available goes to people who actually need it.

Currently, states do not fund abortions for minors. However, states are being negatively affected by the use of taxpayer’s money that goes towards forcing these minors to go through the courts. The delay in access to health care may result in these young women having unintended births. The American Civil Liberties Union found that “the costs associated with childbirth, neonatal and pediatric care greatly exceed the costs of abortion.” We know that a woman under 18 years of age will not be able to support herself and a child without help, and likely to turn to medicaid. Studies have shown that up to 35 percent of Medicaid-eligible women who want abortions, but live in states that do not provide funding for abortion, have been forced to carry their pregnancies to term. Additionally, women under the age of 16 would be able to get consent from parents or a family member 25 years old or older. They may also get consent from a licensed medical professional who has counseled them on their pregnancy. By voting this bill out of committee, you are helping vulnerable young women maintain stable lives while cutting costs to taxpayers.

Giving pregnant minors the opportunity to terminate their pregnancy allows them to continue their education and work towards solid career goals. Women who experience unintended pregnancies tend to be from lower income households. They need an education in order to lift themselves up, but a pregnancy will stifle a young individual’s chances of even completing high school. We, as young women, studying at Brandeis University, know what Massachusetts has to offer in terms of higher educational institutions. We cannot imagine having the educational opportunity we now have if we had experienced an unintended pregnancy. We want to make sure that MA women can take advantage of higher education in their own state.

We want to expand consent options for young women which is why we support An Act to improve healthcare for young women. Bill H.2070 gives young women 16 and older the ability to consent to terminating their pregnancy. Additionally, women under the age of 16 would be able to get consent from parents or a family member 25 years old or older. They may also get consent from a licensed medical professional who has counseled them on their pregnancy. By voting this bill out of committee, you are helping vulnerable young women maintain stable lives while cutting costs to taxpayers.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Megi

Some Statehouse meetings were more conversational but many aides we talked were unfamiliar with this particular bill and they spent their time listening to us explain. One example of this was our meeting with the aide for Rep. Eric Lesser in his office. He invited us to sit down and listened to us talk, but didn’t ask any questions. Instead he wrote down some information and said he would pass it along. These types of meetings felt the most difficult to gauge because of the lack of back and forth. But they taught me to be able to guide a conversation when the other person is simply listening while you speak. Very often, we lead everyday conversation based on how the other person is reacting so it can be uncomfortable to have a less dynamic conversation.

After coming across a few quiet aides, I became much more receptive aides we had met with. Our connection as women...
with experience working on pro-choice bills proved to be important in getting a conversation flowing.

Asisa
One challenge that we faced while working on this bill was not working with a coalition that supported our bill. The lack of correspondence received from the coalition we reached out to was disheartening. The absence of a coalition was problematic because it meant we did not have a group to align ourselves with. Since the content of our bill is controversial, an organized coalition’s support could have proven helpful in moving legislators to vote favorably. Additionally, I feel that a coalition would have had access to resources that could have possibly provided us with extensive data, personal stories, and contact with relevant professionals.

Update
On September 26, 2016 the bill was sent to study. It became part of order H.4638 for public health matters with myriad other bills. As of this publication that order is now in the House Committee on Rules.

View the Bill:
malegislature.gov/Bills/189/House/H2070