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THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

***WITNESS STATEMENT***

***OF***

***THERESA A. MOZZILLO  
MAJOR, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE***

***BEFORE THE***

***SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL***

***OF THE***

***HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE***

***SUBJECT:***

***SERVICE MEMBERS' REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND READINESS***

***JULY 29, 2022***

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Good morning Chairwoman Speier, Ranking Member Gallagher, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. It is an honor to appear before you today to share my personal experience. My name is Theresa Ann Mozzillo and I am Major in the United States Air Force. My comments today are my personal story and do not reflect the views of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, or my current assigned unit United States European Command.

I entered the Air Force as an active-duty enlisted member in 2002. Two weeks ago, I reached twenty years of military service and I was also recently selected for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. I am extremely proud of my military service and thankful for the amazing opportunities it has provided me throughout my career. Growing up in a lower income family in rural western Pennsylvania, the military represented a step up and an exciting career path. I joined the United States Air Force to see the world, serve my country, and complete my college education. I am grateful to have accomplished these goals, and so much more, while serving alongside amazing Airmen, Guardians, Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines.

When I heard the news that Roe vs. Wade had been overturned, my heart sank. It was then I decided to share my abortion story with others for the first time. Nineteen years ago, I discovered I was pregnant at age twenty-one. I was terrified. At the time, I was newly stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri as an Airman First Class, E-3. I was fresh out of technical training as an aerospace ground equipment mechanic. I was in my work center for approximately ninety days. I had no social support system established yet. As a first term airman, I lived in a dormitory and didn't yet have a car. My bi-monthly pay was just over 550 dollars. As a relatively shy person I had only made one friend so far. I was a female airman in a male-dominated environment—and the idea of discussing this personal information with my

leadership was out of the question. I felt devastated and lost. My dream of a successful military career was falling apart before I even had a chance to get started.

But looking back, I realize how fortunate I was at that time. I was fortunate I did not have to travel far to get an abortion. I was lucky that my only friend on the base was willing to drive me to an abortion clinic ninety minutes away along the Missouri and Kansas border. I was lucky the clinic was able to schedule my appointment on a Saturday morning, so I bypassed the need to request time off, which could have been a critical hurdle. It was a shop policy that airmen in upgrade job training were prohibited from taking leave unless it was for a “compelling reason”. I couldn’t imagine having to discuss such a personal matter with my male supervisor.

After my abortion, I had a day to recover in my dorm room before returning to work the following Monday. I had access to reproductive care that I needed, but I had some financial difficulties to overcome. The abortion cost my entire paycheck. I had to wait until the next pay period to repay my friend the gas money for driving me to my appointment. I was grateful to have access to the on-base dining facility for meals, and I scraped by on a near-empty bank account until my next paycheck arrived.

Without question, if I had not been able to have an abortion as a junior enlisted service member, I would not have been able to have my career and would not be before you today. At the time of my pregnancy, I did not have the financial ability, support, or the personal desire to become a single mother serving in the Armed Forces. I know many strong service women who have succeeded as single mothers, but deep down, I knew that abortion was the right personal decision for me.

Today I am speaking in support of the women in the military who will now have a much harder time to access an abortion than I did. I’m here today to give Airman First Class Mozzillo

a chance to tell her story in hopes you consider it when developing policy for women in the Armed Forces. I'm especially concerned for these junior enlisted members on tight financial budgets who are stationed in states that have banned abortion. Many will now need to travel thousands of miles to find an available clinic in a state that supports the legal right to abortion. Will they be able to afford the transportation and hotel costs, along with the cost of an abortion? Will they need to ask their direct supervisors for leave? Will this knowledge compromise their careers? Will their privacy be respected or will it become work center gossip? Most importantly, what will their future look like if they cannot receive an abortion?

My heart is heavy after the Supreme Court's decision. My story is not unique, I personally know many women that have faced much more difficult circumstances accessing an abortion while serving. It deeply saddens me to know that as I come to the end of my career my fellow service women must face so many additional challenges and barriers to access reproductive care. They might not have the same opportunity to succeed as I did. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify here today on an issue of such critical importance to the health and economic well-being of service members. I look forward to any questions.