



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON LGBTQ YOUTH

July 1, 2022

Dear Massachusetts Legislators, Members of the Public, and Youth –

The mission of the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth is to serve and protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth, and to help all youth thrive in the Commonwealth. There is no doubt that this mission includes the determination to protect the rights and opportunities of reproductive freedom for all people, but with specific consideration to those under the age of 25. This same stance and understanding of who constitutes ‘youth’, and the particular vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQIA+ youth, is what led the Commission to support and applaud the passage of the ROE Act in Massachusetts in 2020.

The Commission is deeply concerned by the recent decision of the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v Wade* and its potential impacts on LGBTQIA+ youth in Massachusetts. While rarely discussed in challenges around reproductive rights, bisexual, lesbian, and queer women are just as likely to face unintended pregnancy as heterosexual women, and more likely to face barriers to appropriate gynecological health and abortion access. These disparities in access to reproductive health and freedom are only exacerbated by systemic racism and existing intersectional oppressions which prevent QTBIPOC youth from receiving the same privileges as cisgender heterosexual youth. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ people are more likely to face unintended pregnancies through sexual violence, and youth assigned-female-at-birth are far more likely to experience unintended pregnancies due to social heteronormative pressures to have sex to “prove their heterosexuality” and hide their sexual orientation. In 2019, transgender students were almost four times as likely as heterosexual, cisgender students to face sexual contact against their will, with a staggering 20.4% reporting such abuse, subsequently increasing the number of *reported* instances of sexual assault and unwanted pregnancies.

The Commission strongly recommends that Massachusetts legislators, agencies, and educators clarify and maintain the rights and protections that LGBTQIA+ youth have in regards to reproductive freedom, and work to understand and address any and all barriers to access exacerbated by homophobia, racism, and unnecessary bureaucracy. The Commission fully supports the work done this week in passing H.4954, An Act Expanding Protections for Reproductive Rights, which includes protections for those seeking and providing gender-affirming care, and encourages the Senate to quickly pass this essential bill. Furthermore, the Commission implores the Legislature to pass and codify into law the Healthy Youth Act (S. 2534), which is critical to providing youth with accurate and essential information on inclusive sexual health education and defines consent into Massachusetts law. With a sense of urgency, we must provide inclusive and intersectional sexual health education across the nation, and, disappointingly, Massachusetts currently stands as one of six states that has no clear standards for sexual health education in schools. LGBTQIA+ youth in Massachusetts deserve better.

In Service,

Shaplaie D. Brooks

Shaplaie Brooks
Executive Director