

**April 2, 2023**

The Honorable Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

250 Cannon House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515-3214

Re: Gender Equality and Reproductive Rights in New York

Dear Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

We are Akelia, Erika, Daneil, Shannon, Alisha, Amanda, and Valerie. We are all social work students at Adelphi University, and this year our Social Action Initiative focuses on Gender Equality and Reproductive Rights here in New York.

As you know, the health disparities in underserved communities here in New York are disproportionately high, especially in minority communities. According to the Department of Health statistics, poverty rates are highest in the South Bronx, East Harlem, Central Harlem, and North and Central Brooklyn. These areas have the highest population of Black and Hispanic residents. Limited access to primary health care brings us to our next point. Black women are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women. This is due to many reasons other than lack of access to health care, factors such as chronic stress, racism, providers that ignore these women's concerns, and lack of postpartum and mental health support all contribute to these terrible outcomes.

This fight is crucial because women have fought for fundamental human rights since our nation's inception. A world where our government has a say over our bodies is unsettling. The

overturning of Roe V. Wade leaves many of us wondering if and when it will eventually happen here in NY. We ask that you continue to fight for equal rights for women and help get the Equal Rights Amendment passed in New York State. Lastly, as advocates for women's rights, we wanted to share some of the responses we received from women in our communities.

**How do you feel about women not having the bodily autonomy to sterilize themselves when they have no desire to have children? Why are women required to get permission from a spouse for sterilization?**

*"I think women having autonomy over our bodies is a splendid idea. Why aren't women trusted with deciding what to do with their bodies? As if the consequences would harm someone else instead of the one who made a choice. If women understand themselves enough to know that they do not want to have children and understand they are making this permanent decision knowing they may or may not change their minds in the future, that is a choice we should let them make. Married or not."*

*"I think women should always have body autonomy. The decision to sterilize themselves should be theirs alone. I am unaware of any laws requiring women's permission from their spouses to be sterilized (tubal ligation, hysterectomy). However, if there are any such laws, they are tied to the historical context of women as chattel (property) or the notion that women cannot make good decisions for themselves...clearly ridiculous!"*

**When you hear "gender inequality" or "reproductive rights," what thoughts come to mind and why?**

*"The term "reproductive rights," in my mind, refers to the rights of all women to make decisions about their bodies without the state interfering. No woman should ever be forced to have a child if she does not choose to and should have the right to regulate their body as they see fit."*

*"When I hear gender inequality, I think of the injustice of a person based on their gender. A person should be treated fairly regardless of what they identify as."*

**Do you agree or disagree with the legal challenges to abortion in the years since *Roe v. Wade*? Do you think that the Affordable Care Act should cover all forms of contraception, including emergency contraception?**

*“I disagree with the overturn of Roe V. Wade. As a woman and a mother, I am scared for my daughter’s future in this country. I have suffered three miscarriages, and I have had to have two D&Cs and take Misoprostol because my body did not complete the miscarriage on its own. These interventions are crucial to our health, not just physically but emotionally, mentally, and psychologically. Insurance companies have too much say in what patients need. The insurance company should cover contraception, especially if, in some states, abortions are no longer available.”*

*“I disagree with the legal challenges to abortions in the years since Roe. V Wade. I believe the affordable care act should cover all forms of contraception, including emergency contraception. Nobody should be forced or have their back against the wall when we are limited to decision-making. Many of these things are expensive, and some individuals cannot afford them. Providing this to individuals can help families and individuals drastically.”*

**How accessible are routine GYN care, medical care, period products, and contraceptives for you? This includes how safe/comfortable you feel accessing care and the quality of care and ability to meet your needs.**

*“GYN services are accessible for me as I have health insurance; however, that is not the case for everyone. I am very comfortable accessing care as I researched my provider before to ensure that I will get quality care.”*

*“I can get access to care, but the quality of the care needs to be improved. I feel that doctors rush appointments and don’t spend time getting to know the patient. Also, depending on your plan and where you live, the quality of care may decrease, which is not okay.”*

**How do you think Roe V. Wade has affected you as a woman living in New York City?**

*“Roe V. Wade did not affect me physically, but it did affect me mentally. It made me scared and wonder what if I were to have another kid, what my options would be. It upsets me that someone else is making choices that could affect me. The law should have stayed the same; it’s a woman’s choice because it’s her body and her life.”*

*“As a woman living in New York City, we will still be protected statewide since we are a blue state. But the other women living in other parts of America must be federally protected. Just because we are safe doesn’t mean we should forget about others.”*

Again, we thank you for all you do, have done, and will continue to do in this fight for our rights, equality, and future generations.

Sincerely,

Akelia P., Erika CR., Daneil W., Shannon B., Alisha S., Amanda C., and Valerie J.

Adelphi University

1 South Avenue

Garden City, NY 11530

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“ When I hear gender inequality, I think of the injustice of a person based on their gender. A person should be treated fairly regardless of what they identify as.”

**Do you agree or disagree with the legal challenges to abortion in the years since *Roe v. Wade*? Do you think that Affordable Care Act should cover all forms of contraception, including emergency contraception?**

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“ I do not agree with the legal challenges to abortions in the years since Roe. V Wade. I believe the affordable care act should cover all forms of contraception, including emergency contraception. Nobody should be forced or have their back against the wall when we are limited to decision-making. Many of these things are expensive, and some individuals cannot afford it. Providing this to individuals can help families and individuals drastically.”

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