



April 25, 2017

Rights and Representation

I am proud to have been elected and to serve in a representative democracy. Our system is a representative democracy where people with different views vote for an elected official to represent them and make decisions on their behalf, a responsibility that I honor and do not take lightly. It is always my commitment to listen to the voices of the district, and it is only fair that people have the opportunity to express themselves on issues that they strongly believe in.

I have heard many different views on House Bill 40 over the last several months. House Bill 40 would ensure that abortion in Illinois would remain legal even if the U.S. Supreme Court rolls back *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 ruling that made abortion legal in the U.S. The legislation would remove a so-called trigger provision in the 1975 Illinois Abortion Law, which says the state would once again make abortion illegal if the Supreme Court overturned or altered *Roe v. Wade*. In addition, it would prevent insurers from denying coverage of abortion services for women on Medicaid and those on the state health insurance plan.

I have met with many groups of people over the last several months, the vast majority who were in favor of HB40. I started an informal poll on February 5 which asked, "Do you support HB40 which ensures that Illinois allows Full Access to Reproductive Health Care?" More than 1600 responded and 97.1% voted yes. I proposed an amendment to the bill to ensure that Medicaid will not pay for late-term abortions, just to make this point crystal-clear. Though HB40 was a very difficult issue, I voted for this bill because I thought it was important to respect and represent the views of those who feel that their rights as previously defined by law would be threatened should *Roe v. Wade* be overturned by the Supreme Court.

There is tension between the right of a woman's individual decision and the right of a developing life. Even though my personal view is that abortion should be very, very rare, I voted for HB40. I believe that we cannot legislate individual morality, and that the Church and others opposed to abortion have a role to promote individual morality and to support people so abortion becomes rarer and rarer.

There is also tension when our society does not fully support those who want to provide everything they can for their baby, but cannot. And, we cannot ignore the racial disparities – with only 13.2% of the population in the United States, African Americans make up 36.7% of abortions from the 26 states reporting to the CDC in 2012, almost the same as whites, which made up 37.6% of abortions. Data from Illinois were not available.

All Black Lives Matter. Are we doing all we can to prevent unwanted pregnancies, space children to make it easier for families, promote and make it easier to adopt, provide universal high-quality child care, eliminate Medicaid copays for medications and services, and provide job opportunities for mothers AND fathers to support their young families? We have to address WHY abortions occur and address these issues with as much vigor as possible.

Though we cannot legislate individual morality, I am committed to using social justice as a foundational principle as we form Illinois laws to help people. We must continue to use a moral compass to guide our decisions, our policy, and our budgets. For example, is it a surprise that African Americans make up 37% of all abortions and are also subject to schools that are poorly funded? This is also a moral choice –we must fund our schools to improve quality and provide a fully rounded education – this is a way to decrease the number of abortions.

A scared 14 year old girl growing up in Cabrini-Green in 1972 carried out her pregnancy, with the grandmother adopting the baby boy at birth, nurturing him and sacrificing so much to give him many opportunities. That was me - I am so grateful that I was given that chance at life, and that my biological mother carried me to term. We need to work to give all babies a chance, and to work with increased intensity to improve those social determinants that can improve life for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSK Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District