

**Hon. Joanne Rodríguez Veve**

**President of the Commission of Life and Family Affairs**

Senate of Puerto Rico

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Honorable Rodríguez Veve,

Currently in Puerto Rico, there are few legal restrictions on access to abortion, which can take place at any stage in the pregnancy when carried out by a doctor to conserve the life or the health, including mental health, of the pregnant person.

However, a recently published bill would restrict access to abortion after 22 weeks, or when a doctor determines that the foetus is viable, with the only exception being if the pregnant persons' life is in danger. It would not permit a termination after 22 weeks for other reasons, such as where there is a diagnosis of foetal impairment, where the pregnancy is the result of incest and/or sexual violence, or where the pregnant person was unaware of the pregnancy or had limited access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and/or abortion services.

Restrictions on access to abortion would constitute a retrogression in rights and a barrier to accessing public health services, which risks having a disproportionate impact on women and pregnant people in serious situations - such as those who need abortions for medical reasons to safeguard their health, or who have experienced sexual violence or trafficking and who were unable to access abortion earlier - as well as those who are already historically marginalized and for whom access to abortion may be more difficult, for example, due to lack of financial resources.

We write to you, urging you to take a stand against any regression in the human rights protection of women, girls and all others who can become pregnant. A first step towards this is to ensure **that any public hearings that take place regarding Bill #693 are objective, meaning that all interventions from a diversity of stakeholders are equally heard**, and subject to meaningful human rights scrutiny. This would help to ensure a suitable process is in place, and avoid potentially grave negative impacts on the rights to life, health, and privacy of girls and women and all others who can become pregnant.

International human rights law and standards require states to ensure access to safe and legal abortion to protect women's and girls' life and health at all stages of pregnancy without discrimination. The Human Rights Council in its General Comment 36 on the Right to Life has prohibited states from regulating abortion in a manner that runs contrary to their duty to ensure that women and girls do not have to undertake unsafe abortions. As such, people's ability to make decisions about one's body, sexuality and reproduction is at the core of gender, economic and social justice, and states must not legislate with the aim to remove any human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights.

Yours sincerely,