

2 February 2015

Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee
Sen. Mary Pilcher-Cook, Chair

Kansas State Capitol Building
SW 8th and SW Van Buren
Room 118-N
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Senator and Committee Members:

My name is Melissa Tovar-Ohlson. I am a mother and I am also one of the thousands of Kansas women who have faced an unintended pregnancy and who have made the personal decision to have an abortion. Because of this I stand here today as an advocate for every other Kansas woman who may be confronted with this choice.

Since I was a young girl, I have dreamed of becoming a mother. I always knew I wanted children. I always knew it would be my job to love them, accept them, and guide them. Motherhood was something I took very seriously, and looked forward to.

I was 19 when I found myself alone and pregnant. I knew that I had a choice to make and options to weigh. Most of all, I knew that I was not emotionally ready to be the mom I had always dreamed of becoming.

I was sexually assaulted by three men a few months before I became pregnant. I was fighting depression, anxiety and PTSD. I was self-medicating with alcohol just to make it through each day. I wasn't financially prepared. I had a minimum wage job and was barely supporting myself. I was alone and I was afraid.

When my mom found out that I was pregnant, she invited me home to have the baby. I thought about what life would be like raising a child with an absent father. What would I say when my child asked why he or she didn't have a dad? How could I force my child to live with the heartache and sadness that comes with feeling rejected by a parent? I thought about the disappointment and resentment my child would be burdened with from birth.

I thought about what it would be like to chase the father around for child support, time, and attention. I knew I couldn't count on him for much, if anything. He wouldn't even see me so that I could tell him I was pregnant. I was on my own. And I had to face that.

So, I weighed my options. From the beginning, the one thing I knew with certainty was that no option was without its consequences. For me, it was a matter of making a choice that caused the least amount of suffering.

As I mentioned, I had a nice offer from my parents to move home and have the baby. But I live in a small town, and so many girls get trapped that way. They never leave, they never finish school, and they never do the things they always dreamed about. It's as if they stop being and start seeming. I couldn't live that way. That was not for me.

I thought about adoption. But the truth is I didn't want to be pregnant. After my sexual assault, I wanted to call the shots. I wanted complete and total control over my life and my body, something that the assault had taken from me. I didn't want to share my body for nine months with a being I couldn't provide and care for once it was born.

I decided to have an abortion. It was the best choice for me. It has afforded me the opportunity to be the mom I dreamed of being as a girl. I married my husband, Ammon and became pregnant with my son Van in 2006. I was over the moon. I had a stable marriage, we both had jobs, and we rented a little house in a small town.

The experience was completely different this time. I wasn't terrified, I was excited. I didn't dread finding a way to support my baby. I had a partner, a husband to help me. And my baby would have his father in his life every day. We would be a family, not someone's throw-aways, left to scatter with the winds.

I have two children now with my husband. Van is seven and in second grade. Ellery is five and in Kindergarten. These children are my world. When I think of them my eyes fill with tears and my heart is overflowing with love. They are about as perfect as it gets. I am so grateful I get to be their mother. I am beyond proud to say that they belong to me. I am able to care and provide for them in a way that fills me with joy. My mothering is a point of immense pride and my amazing children are the proof of that.

Having choices MATTERS. When you have choices you can create opportunity, when you have opportunities your possibilities become endless. And that is where I am in my life right now. I am in love with my family, I am at peace with my decisions, and my possibilities are endless.

Sincerely,

Melissa Tovar-Ohlson

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "M Tovar-Ohlson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the printed name.