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**TESTIMONY OF KATE MICHELMAN,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL
ABORTION RIGHTS ACTION
LEAGUE, BEFORE THE SENATE
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE ON
THE NOMINATION OF
JUDGE CLARENCE THOMAS
September 19, 1991**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, during this confirmation process, we must remember a very simple truth: What is decided here will profoundly affect the lives of the millions of Americans outside this hearing room — Americans who depend upon you to protect their most cherished rights and liberties. When we get past constitutional theory, precedent, and court rulings, this confirmation process will determine whether millions of women will be forced, terrified and alone, to face one of the most devastating crises of their lives. Among them are countless desperate women who, prior to *Roe v. Wade*, were deprived of their privacy, their dignity, and even their health and lives.

Mr. Chairman, today I must tell you that I was one of those women. I was relatively lucky. I was able to avoid resorting to the back alleys. But, I suffered the shame, degradation, and humiliation of being deprived of my right to make one of the most important decisions of my life.

Like most women, I never expected to need an abortion. But before *Roe*, I faced the trauma of a crisis pregnancy. I was raised Catholic and, as a young woman, I had three wonderful daughters in three years. But, in 1970, my husband suddenly announced that he was leaving me and the children.

I was devastated. Without money, a job, or a car, I was even unable to get a charge account at the local five and dime. I was also very ill at the time. My self-esteem was destroyed, my entire world was also shattered, and my family was forced onto welfare.

Almost immediately after my husband left me, I discovered that I was pregnant. With three children under the age of six, I alone had to meet their every need — financial, emotional, and physical. The very survival of my family was at stake.

Deciding whether or not to have an abortion was one of the most difficult and complex decisions of my life. It challenged every religious, moral, ethical, and philosophical belief I had. Because abortion largely was illegal, I had to struggle with this decision alone.

But, in 1970, the government would not allow me to make this decision for myself. I was forced to appear before a hospital-appointed panel of four men. I was an adult woman, a mother of three, and yet I had to win their permission to make a decision about my family, my life, my future. These complete strangers cross-examined me about the most intimate and personal details of my life. It was humiliating.

Finally, they granted me their permission, and I was admitted to the hospital. Yet, as I awaited the procedure, I was told that they had forgotten one more legal requirement. I would not be able to have an abortion without written permission from the man who had just deserted me and my children. I literally had to leave the hospital and find the man who had rejected me. It was a degrading, dehumanizing experience — an assault to my integrity, my dignity, and my very sense of self.

At all times during this process I carried with me the name and phone number of an illegal abortionist. If at any juncture I was thwarted in my attempt to have a hospital abortion, I was prepared to break the law and risk my life because my family's survival depended on it.

Mr. Chairman, Senators, perhaps now you can begin to understand the pain and anger I feel when I hear the right to choose dismissed as a mere "single issue." This right is absolutely fundamental: Fundamental to our dignity, to our power to shape our lives, and to our ability to act in the best interests of our families. No issue has a greater impact on the lives and futures of American women and their families.

The record shows that, if confirmed, Judge Thomas would vote to take away this fundamental right — to take this nation back to the days when women had no alternative but the back alleys for health care. What happens in the halls of Congress must reflect what is in the hearts of the American people. This may be one of

the last opportunities you have to stand up for a woman's fundamental right to choose before *Roe v. Wade* is overturned. I urge you to refuse to confirm Judge Thomas.

