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Statement of Sarah Deer

I'm Sarah, a 30-year-old stage 3B breast cancer survivor and victim of the University Hospitals' systematic failure and negligence. I traveled from Pittsburgh to share my story today, just like I traveled from Pittsburgh consistently to University Hospitals to keep my dream of having a family safe and secure before undergoing treatment for cancer. I risked my life and delayed my chemotherapy treatments because having a family was so important to me. My mom cautioned me against it, urging me to begin my treatment; I am, after all, her baby; but I told her that I wanted a baby of my own to care for one day in the same way that she cares for me. It was comforting to know that, in the end, if I didn't need to use all of my retrieved eggs, I could donate them to a family who needed them. Because of the freezer malfunction at University Hospitals, I will never be able to use the 29 eggs that I placed in their care, and neither will anyone else in need.

When my now-husband and I found out that we had retrieved 29 eggs--"A 'Fleury' of eggs," he said, referencing the then-Pittsburgh Penguins goaltender, Marc-Andre Fleury's, jersey number--we were overjoyed. Together, we felt like we had secured our future; privately, I felt that I had secured our family, even if I didn't survive treatment. My husband would still be able to raise our family, even if I could not.

With chemotherapy treatments, my doctors couldn't be certain that I would regain my fertility, and they still aren't today. The only way for me to find out is if I stop taking the medication that is saving my life--the medication that lowers my risk of recurrence. So what do I do? Do I stop my medication and risk my life, once again, to see if after everything I have endured I can still have a family? Do I pump myself full of hormonal medications that feed my cancer type? Or do I play it safe and risk remaining a family of two? No one should have to contemplate these questions. No one should have to suffer like this.

When I first heard the news about this whole debacle, I was shocked. I called the help line hoping that maybe, just maybe, my eggs weren't affected. When I spoke to the nurse on the help line, I learned that they were. My eggs were 29 of the 4,000 eggs and embryos carelessly ruined by University Hospitals. I cried, and my husband comforted me. I opened a letter a few days later--a generic "notice" with no apology. I spoke the doctors and tried to formulate a plan, but no one has answers for me. This should not have happened to me or the near thousand other families, and I want to make sure that it never happens again.

I have lost sleep every night, waking up with scenarios of what to do next rolling through my mind; I have lost faith in University Hospitals' ability to care for me and any others whose stories and grief I have heard; I have lost my future, comprised of 29 precious eggs; I have lost everything.

The CEO of University Hospitals said in a video that they grieve with me, but is it possible to feel the weight of my grief? Like Atticus Finch would say, climb into my skin. Walk around in it. I guarantee that it is like nothing you've ever felt before. I am a woman, wounded; robbed by cancer of my health and the body that I once knew, and robbed by University Hospitals of my future.

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