

PLAINTIFFS SPEAK OUT FOR MAKING THE MORNING-AFTER PILL AVAILABLE OVER-THE-COUNTER

The following are testimonies from 4 of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit Tummino v. von Eschenbach. The suit charges the FDA with ignoring scientific fact and holding the Morning-After Pill to a different standard than other over-the-counter drugs—consequently, breaking the FDA's rules and regulations.

STEPHANIE SEGUIN

President of Gainesville, Florida NOW:

I had needed the morning after pill when my boyfriend, who is now my husband, and I had had sex and the condom came off. The following morning, which was a Saturday, I braved the football game day traffic to go to the campus infirmary which was closed. I had no idea where else I could possibly get it. So I just crossed my fingers and hoped that I wouldn't be pregnant, I knew I would want an abortion if I was, rather than having to drop out of school and move back in with my parents. How great it would have been if I could have just had it in my bathroom cabinet or ran to the local drugstore to get it!

Women deserve access to the morning after pill any time, anywhere, and for any reason. And as for an age restriction, unwanted pregnancy is much more disruptive and dangerous when you're young. A result of not taking the morning after pill when you're 14 can mean having a baby when you're 14.

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ERIN MAHONEY

Chair Emeritus, Women's Liberation Birth Control Project

When I needed the morning after pill, I was in Detroit, Michigan for the first time. I had just helped my boyfriend move and we didn't know a soul. We used condoms as our birth control method, but this time I needed the morning after pill. I was luckier than other women. I had gone to a feminist gynecologist, and she had insisted that I take a prescription for the morning after pill with me in case I ever needed it. I had kept it in my medicine bag until that night when I needed it. If I had not had the morning after pill with me, I would not have had the first clue where to start looking for a doctor's office in Detroit, let alone one open on a Saturday night when I needed it. I read the instructions and followed them exactly. I didn't get sick or throw up. I was just relieved I wasn't going to get pregnant.

But what really bothers me about this whole process is that if I happen to go to a good doctor that is willing to write me a prescription just in case I need it, I'm lucky. If I go to a doctor who refuses to prescribe it in advance, I'm out of luck. I shouldn't have to rely on luck to control my life. I shouldn't have to rely on a doctor for a drug that is safe and effective within the first 24 hours after sex.

We have a lot of experts in the room today, but I have taken the morning after pill, and I know what could have happened if I hadn't had it on hand, and I know what could happen to me if it isn't over the counter. I think that makes me an expert.

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ANNIE TUMMINO

Chair, Women's Liberation Birth Control Project

The first time I needed the Morning-After Pill I went away for a long weekend and got a couple of days behind on my daily birth control pills. Taking the pill is part of my routine and when I am on vacation it is easier to forget. I began to panic. I work at a small business and I had to go in to work since there was no one to cover for me that day. Finally, after hunting around I found a NYC hotline that called in a prescription for me. I took Plan B and had no side effects at all. The next time I was not so lucky. I was on a camping trip with my boyfriend and needed the Morning-After Pill. There was no way for me to get to a doctor so I had to cross my fingers and wait for my next period to come. If it was over-the-counter I would have driven to the nearest gas station or drug store and picked it up. Luckily I didn't get pregnant. I know I am not ready to have a child and I shouldn't have to jump through so many hoops to control my body. The FDA needs to stop holding women's health hostage and approve this safe and effective form of birth control for over-the-counter sales.

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KELLY MANGAN

Chair, Florida NOW Young Feminist Task Force:

Women should not be told when or under what circumstances we can control our bodies. Yet here I stand ironically before a panel many of whom are men having to ask for the right to control my body and direct my life.

I have used the morning-after pill twice after condoms came off inside me while I was having sex. I didn't get pregnant, and I also didn't have any of the over-hyped side effects.

I got the morning after pill from my campus infirmary to have if I ever needed it, but the nurse who prescribed it asked prying questions about my relationship with my partner. She also discouraged me from taking the morning after pill again because of possible side effects, while at the same time encouraged me to go back on birth control pills which could have far more serious side effects than the morning after pill.

If I could really control my fertility, meaning 24 hours a day and without having to beg a doctor or a pharmacist for permission, then I would have more time, more money, and more personal freedom. Basically I would have more control over my life.

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