

After a week of the pain flaring through my pelvis and abdomen, I knew something was wrong. On a whim, I took a pregnancy test and the plus sign felt more like a negative, especially in light of the searing pain. I knew I had two options: I could go to the ER, where an explanation of benefits would eventually be sent to my father with conservative values who would likely kick me out. Or I could go to the local women's clinic that worked on a sliding scale basis. The local clinic made room to see me immediately where they diagnosed an ectopic pregnancy. Their help saved my life and also instilled in me a commitment to helping people in need of sexual and reproductive health care. I gravitated towards understanding the coverage, function, and cost of medications and services to better advocate for this care. As my career progressed, I knew working in health policy was the best way to achieve my goals.

I obtained my bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2011 where I studied primatology and medical anthropology. My interest in health led me to help develop the first annual Wisconsin Dance Marathon as a Hospital Relations Co-Chair for the American Family Children's Hospital. Additionally, I worked at the Wisconsin National Primate Research Center, delivering biomedical research articles to researchers. While I was equally interested in primatology, my work and interests frequently intersected with public health. I learned how to study ecological models of behavior applicable to human and non-human primates, and intended to put it into practice.

After graduating, I developed an independent research project, where upon completion, I presented my findings at the Midwest Primate Interest Group. Following my independent research, I began working for Humana. As a Pharmacy Customer Service Representative, I learned all about medications; why they were covered a certain way, how they were covered, and what they did. Within 6 months, I was familiar with pertinent state laws across the country for specific drugs and fully trained in medical, vision, and dental benefits. It was at this point I decided I was more invested in public health than primatology and took a course in statistics to understand quantitative methods. My continued interest in learning led to a position as an Integrated Specialist where I learned all lines of business in health insurance and became a pharmacy subject matter expert.

I returned to school for my Master of Public Health degree from the University of Louisville after working for several years. I am majoring in Health Policy and obtained a certificate in LGBT Health. Currently, I am at the top of my program with a 3.96 GPA and expect to graduate in May 2020. While I received GRE scores above the top 25th percentile in both verbal and writing, I was within the 70th percentile for quantitative skills. Despite this, I have received As in every statistics course I have taken and 100% in my research methodology classes, which is more indicative of my quantitative and research capabilities.

I will complete my MPH program within three years as opposed to the standard two in order to continue working full-time to pay for living costs. Currently, I am working at IDEAS xLab as an AmeriCorps VISTA on a project to improve health outcomes and build capacity in the historically Black Smoketown neighborhood through arts and public health projects. For the last two summers, I have been a student participant at the Temple University Policy Surveillance Summer Institute, where I studied policy surveillance and legal epidemiology methods. Putting this skill into practice, I am assisting Drs. Liza Creel and Marissa Yingling as a Graduate Research Assistant on a legal epidemiology project regarding early intervention programs for children with developmental delays, autism, hearing loss, and neonatal abstinence syndrome. I am also concurrently developing my own research project on HPV

vaccines in adolescents and the impact of insurance continuity on the decision to vaccinate, with a plan to submit for publication in a peer-reviewed journal by the end of the year.

Additionally, as a Legislative Fellow for Planned Parenthood of Indiana and Kentucky, I regularly advocate for fact-based sexual health education, increased Medicaid funding, and maintaining Title X programs with federal and state legislators and within the community. During the 2020 Kentucky General Assembly, I will be presenting policy briefs with state legislators to protect the sexual and reproductive health and well-being of Kentuckians across the Commonwealth. At the local level, I will be promoting a patient safety zone around the only abortion clinic within the state by providing the policy analysis.

I am applying to the Community Health Sciences - Maternal and Child Health PhD program at the University of Illinois-Chicago for several reasons. First, the classes are of direct and strong interest for me, particularly MCH Policy and Advocacy. Additionally, the ability to take classes at Northwestern and University of Chicago through the Chicago Metropolitan Exchange Program is enticing. Second, many of my values are shared with that of the department; social justice and advocacy work are two things that are important to me. Third, UIC is one of the few institutions that specializes in Maternal and Child Health, and offers both the UIC Center for Healthy Work and Center of Excellence for Maternal and Child Health, both of which are relevant to my research interests. The Center of Excellence's objective of having 85% of PhD graduates in advanced leadership upon graduating indicates to me the program will invest in my success which is critical to me as a first-generation graduate student. Upon graduating with my degree, I plan to conduct my own research for a research and policy organization such as the Guttmacher Institute, and I know UIC will be one of the best places in which to build my skill set for such a career.

My experience receiving care for my ectopic pregnancy solidified my research interests around sexual, reproductive, and maternal health. I am interested in how certain policies, such as pregnant worker protection laws, may impact maternal mortality rates in Black and Latina women. Both of these populations tend to have high rates of maternal mortality compared to their white counterparts. Evidence suggests both stress and certain physical working conditions are contributors towards these high mortality rates. I am interested in investigating if there is an association between states that have enacted pregnant worker protection laws and potential effects on maternal mortality rates in Black and Latina women. I would also like to compare between states that have implemented these laws and ones that have not. I can see such a project potentially utilizing mixed-methods including legal epidemiology and utilizing secondary data.

I feel several individuals in the department would complement my own interest in this work; specifically, Dr. Jeni Hebert-Beirne, as I believe her work on studies in women's health and workplaces would be important to learn from in informing my own future research. Dr. Arden Handler is another individual who I would be interested in working with for her expertise on maternal health, health policies, and health disparities. I also believe Dr. Lorraine Conroy would serve as another individual in which I could learn from, based on her expertise on healthy working conditions. As such, I believe UIC would be the perfect environment for me to learn to become an effective investigator and leader based on its faculty, resources for students, and emphasis on advocacy.

A decade ago, I learned what it was like to be a pregnant patient. Now, I want to use my lived experience to inform my research on the effects of health policies on outcomes for pregnant women. If I

am selected, I will be a positive contributor to the program and UIC student body; with a degree from UIC, I know I can be a positive contributor to policies that improve maternal and child health outcomes.