

I'm Denise Murden and I've traveled here from Suffolk, VA, to speak on behalf of the 1,000 members of the American Association of University Women of Virginia who support our sisters and brothers in Grayson County who oppose this board's attempts to force people to continue a pregnancy against their will. I am providing a letter from AAUW of Virginia, signed by our state President, confirming our opposition to this ordinance.

The proposed abortion ban before you tonight is designed to control, dehumanize, and criminalize women. Should you pass it, you will find yourselves in the company of one of the world's most notorious Communist dictators, Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania, whose policies of banning abortions and policing women's bodies for more than two decades never achieved his intended objective of increasing the country's birthrate; his policies simply ensured that more than 10,000 women died, and Romania's maternal mortality rate rose to the highest in Europe with 87 percent of maternal deaths attributed to complications from illegal abortions. Women who were hospitalized for complications from abortions or even suspected abortions were left to die if they would not implicate themselves or others. Women who had unauthorized abortions, most of them already mothers, and those who performed or help procure them were

incarcerated. Medical providers were forced to choose between their own freedom from jail and saving women's lives.

The abortion ban, which was accompanied by lack of access to contraceptives and a mandate that every woman under the age of 45 bear five children, also led to the warehousing of hundreds of thousands of children who were turned over to state orphanages when their economically strapped families could not afford to feed more mouths. Women came to think of their reproductive lives as "the enemy within."

The results of Romania's decades-long efforts to control women's bodies are well documented, but I witnessed them for myself when I traveled there in 1991 and again in 1993 to adopt my daughter from one of the orphanages. The culture of fear that the ban and other repressive measures that Ceausescu imposed on the people was still palpable. Friends, neighbors, even family members had not been able to fully confide in one another for 23 years, an entire generation. Imposing a ban on abortion demands surveillance and policing of women's bodies and that included Secret Police questioning and often criminally charging a web of loved ones and friends. After Ceausescu's execution on Christmas Day in 1989 and a nearly immediate rescission of the abortion ban, trust

among people was slow to build and communities struggled to come together for the common good even though their despised, repressive leader was gone.

Is this the result you seek to achieve with this ordinance? To emulate a Communist dictator? To alienate family members and friends and rip Grayson County communities apart?

Americans are proud of their freedom, but we aren't truly free unless we can control our own bodies, lives, and futures. In a democracy, we expect that everyone will be free to follow their own beliefs, moral code and conscience. Our laws should protect our rights, not control and dehumanize us, nor is it your job as county board supervisors to punish or shame those who decide to have or support an abortion. All people should be able to control their own bodies, so I urge you to vote no on this ordinance and commit to a future where Grayson County communities are thriving and everyone has the freedom to control their own bodies, safely care for their families, and live with dignity.