

# News From The States

## REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS TODAY

Thanks for being here and [supporting our work](#).



By [Elisha Brown](#)



*U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland summarized his agency's abortion-related litigation in Alabama and Idaho, among other efforts.  
(Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)*

After the U.S. Supreme Court decision in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case that overturned *Roe v. Wade* last year, the U.S. Department of Justice announced a [task force](#) to defend abortion rights and reproductive care access.

Justice Department officials provided updates Monday on the agency's work in the 18 months since its inception. The Biden administration has taken legal action in **Alabama** and **Idaho** — two states with near-total abortion bans — and sought to preserve access to medication abortion.

“As I said on the day Dobbs was decided, bedrock constitutional principles dictate that women who reside in states that have banned access to comprehensive reproductive care must remain free to seek that care in states where it is legal,” U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland [said](#) in a statement.

**In Alabama, federal authorities joined a lawsuit last month brought against state Attorney General Steve Marshall by providers over his statements suggesting health care workers can be prosecuted for helping patients get abortion care elsewhere.** Plaintiffs argued the position violates the interstate right to travel established by the 14th Amendment, [Alabama Reflector](#) reports.

Justice Department attorneys also cited Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh’s opinion in Dobbs to back up their argument. Kavanaugh [wrote](#) that Dobbs does not permit states to enact abortion-related travel bans.

In Idaho, the federal government sued the state last year, calling for enforcement of a federal law requiring hospitals that receive federal Medicare funding to provide emergency care, including abortions, to patients in need, [States Newsroom](#) reports. **Garland said the Justice Department filed a [brief](#) with the Supreme Court last week seeking to preserve Idahoans’ rights to emergency abortions.**

Lawyers representing state officials recently urged the conservative-leaning Supreme Court to stop Idaho from having to comply with the federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act.

**Alliance Defending Freedom** is representing Idaho Attorney General Raúl Labrador’s office. The legal group is also behind the lawsuit urging the judiciary to revoke the decades-old federal approval of [mifepristone](#), one of two drugs used to terminate pregnancies. Justice Department officials are seeking to protect not only abortion medication, but also the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s regulatory authority. The Supreme Court has not decided if it will take up the abortion pill case.

**THE BEAT** *States Newsroom coverage*

## **Mental health, substance use affect New Mexico’s maternal death rates**



*Experts say substance use and behavioral health treatment could alleviate the state's maternal death toll.  
(Getty Images)*

New Mexico's pregnancy-related death rate is higher than the national rate, according to the state's Maternal Mortality Review Committee. Nationwide, there were 17.3 deaths per 100,000 births from 2015 to 2019. In New Mexico, there were **31.2 deaths per 100,000 births from 2015 to 2020**. Substance use and mental health conditions contributed to the majority of deaths within a year of childbirth, said Abigail Reese, the manager of the state's Maternal Health Program.

"That means we need to do more to direct treatment and resources and support to people who are navigating substance use while pregnant and in the postpartum period," Reese told [Source New Mexico](#). Separately, there were higher mortality rates for Native American women and people over the age of 35 in the state. Officials said **environmental stressors, such as unemployment, a history of psychiatric hospitalization and domestic violence could be affecting postpartum death tolls.**

The state plans to convene a maternal health innovation task force in two years through a nearly \$1 million federal grant. Reese said requiring certified nurse midwives to take anti-bias training — a policy that doesn't require additional state funding — could help, too. Alanna Dancis, a nurse practitioner and chief medical officer for New Mexico's Medicaid program, said increasing treatment for substance use and behavioral health is imperative. **Officials expanded postpartum Medicaid coverage from two months to a year in 2022, but the policy doesn't take effect until July 2024.** Dancis also hopes to pay hospitals to stop closing labor and delivery units, another exacerbating factor in the maternity care crisis.

---

## Connecticut approves rural maternity ward closure

Health officials in Connecticut approved Windham Hospital's plan to permanently end labor and delivery services, [CT Mirror](#) reports. The approval, announced last week, comes with caveats. **Hospital administrators must hire a third party to assess the need and plausibility of establishing a birthing center in the area.** If a review concludes a birthing center is needed, hospital officials must find a provider to operate the facility or open up one independently. The hospital will still provide prenatal and postnatal care.

Windham Hospital stopped delivering babies in June 2020, a move that maternal health advocates protested for over three years. "This is how you kill a small city," Willimantic town council member Rodney Alexander told CT Mirror during a [protest](#) last month. **Two other rural hospitals in the state are trying to close childbirth units, also citing staff shortages and low birth rates.** Only one rural hospital offering birthing services will remain if the Connecticut Office of Health Strategy approves the additional closures.

---

## Florida abortion rights petition nears signature benchmark

Election officials in Florida have verified more than 620,000 signatures for a petition to put an abortion initiative directly on the ballot next year. **The group spearheading the effort has collected 621,690 verified signatures toward the 891,523 needed to make the Feb. 1 ballot deadline,** [Florida Phoenix](#) reports. Floridians Protecting Freedom has focused on key congressional districts, including large cities like Orlando and Tampa. Group director Lauren Brenzel said in a statement last week that the group's internal signature count is much higher than the state's tally, and they're "very confident" they'll meet the requirements.

A recent University of Florida [poll](#) found that **62% of respondents would approve the measure**, while 29% would reject it and 9% saying they don't know or declined to answer. Regardless of the initiative's support, the Florida Supreme Court still has to review the ballot language to determine if the proposed measure is clear and sticks to a single subject. The proposed amendment could guarantee abortion access through fetal viability or beyond if a patient's health or life is endangered by pregnancy. Republican Attorney General Ashley Moody is pressing the state Supreme Court to reject the petition. Moody, Florida Voice for the Unborn and national anti-abortion groups argue the language contains vague words, such as "viability," that confuse voters.

**THE PULL** *Commentary from Michigan*

"For too long, it was easy to feel helpless in Michigan. Efforts to protect LGBTQ+ people from discrimination started and stalled. Anti-abortion lobbyists successfully kept chipping away at

basic health care rights. And a devastating 2021 school shooting in Oxford resulted in thoughts and prayers, but little immediate legislative action.

But as it turns out, it wasn't that leaders didn't care about issues deeply important to most Michiganders. It was just that not enough of them were in a position to do anything about it.

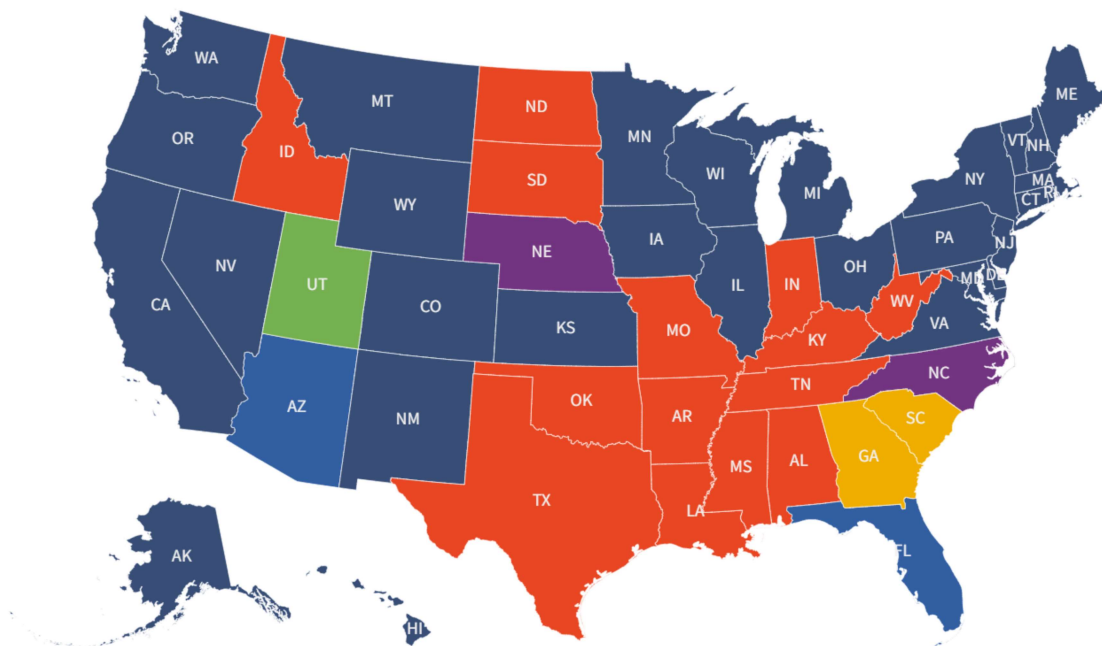
Voters, who had enough of inaction, bucked history (and [shocked the pundit class](#)) last year by voting for [total Democratic control of Michigan](#) — even though it was a midterm election where President Joe Biden's poll numbers weren't exactly setting the world on fire.”

— **Susan J. Demas**, editor-in-chief, [Michigan Advance](#)

### **THE PULSE** *Reproductive rights news across the country*

- Hadley Duvall, a 21-year-old woman who became pregnant after her stepfather raped her as a child, reflected on why her appearance in an ad for Kentucky Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear's re-election bid resonated with moderates and conservatives. ([The Washington Post](#))
- Authorities dropped charges against a South Carolina woman accused of self-managing her abortion. ([Charleston Post & Courier](#))
- Kansas abortion funds are struggling to keep up with demand as donations wane. ([Kansas Public Radio](#))
- A Detroit-based trans doula provides care to queer communities and debunks misconceptions about the practice. ([Pride Source](#))

### **STATE BY STATE** *Abortion access in the U.S.*



Open this interactive map in your browser

Track state-level developments on reproductive rights anytime at [News From The States](#).  
Send tips and thoughts to [ebrown@statesnewsroom.com](mailto:ebrown@statesnewsroom.com), and follow her on Twitter  
[@elishacbrown](#).

---

---

©News From The States, all rights reserved.

[www.newsfromthestates.com](http://www.newsfromthestates.com) | [info@newsfromthestates.com](mailto:info@newsfromthestates.com)

Manage your donation and subscription preferences [here](#).

Add [info@newsfromthestates.com](mailto:info@newsfromthestates.com) to your [address book](#) to ensure delivery.

Did someone forward you this newsletter? [Click here](#) to get it delivered to your inbox.

States Newsroom – News From The States

1414 Raleigh Rd #127

Chapel Hill, NC 27517

United States

You are receiving this email because you opted in via our website or States Newsroom. If you believe you received this message in error or wish to change your subscription, please (Unsubscribing is not supported in previews).