

# News From The States

## REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS TODAY

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By [Elisha Brown](#)



*Three Ohio Republicans vying for U.S. Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown's office are openly anti-abortion, and three state Supreme Court seats are on the ballot, too.  
(Graham Stokes/Ohio Capital Journal)*

Supporters of Ohio's reproductive rights constitutional amendment say putting the issue before voters in 2023, instead of this year, was a key to the ballot measure's success.

Political experts told the [Ohio Capital Journal](#) that the momentum from the state's November special election could transfer this fall, when Ohioans will [vote](#) for representation in Congress, the state Supreme Court, the legislature and several other offices.

Voters' approval of the reproductive rights amendment two months ago followed an August election where they rejected a bid by the GOP-controlled legislature to raise the threshold for

changing the state constitution.

“There was an awakening here and people started to realize there was this power grab and an assault on democracy,” said Jeff Rusnak, lead strategist for Ohio Physicians for Reproductive Rights. The group is a part of the coalition that organized the campaign to secure abortion access and related rights in the state.

Doctors told Rusnak that abortion laws, such as a six-week ban, pushed by the legislature were interfering with the patient-provider relationship and damaging their profession.

**Rusnak said the groups behind the effort initially wanted to put abortion directly on the ballot in 2024 — historically, voters show up in greater numbers during presidential election years. But he urged advocates to move forward sooner, pointing to the [midterm success](#) of Michigan’s reproductive rights ballot measure in November 2022.**

“Even if there’s a high turnout, it doesn’t necessarily benefit these types of issues or candidates who support these types of issues,” Rusnak said.

The strategy worked, and the opposition inadvertently helped. Republicans passed a resolution asking voters to make it harder to amend the constitution. In that referendum, [57% of voters rejected the measure](#).

“Ohio voters understood there was something undemocratic about changing the rules in the middle of the game,” said Professor Steven Steinglass, dean emeritus at Cleveland State University’s College of Law. Steinglass said the move actually strengthened Issue 1, which [nearly 60% of voters approved](#) last fall.

**Engagement from Ohio’s 2023 elections “can only help” the democratic process in 2024**, according to Rusnak. “I think people are more than willing to speak out, they’ve been given permission to do that and I think it makes voters feel like they’re not alone,” he said.

**Abortion is already a top issue in the race for an Ohio U.S. Senate seat.** Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, up for reelection, has positioned himself as an abortion rights candidate. Three Republicans vying for Brown’s seat oppose abortion.

For instance, Secretary of State [Frank LaRose](#) once said the August special election was “100%” about thwarting the abortion rights measure. LaRose, who also chairs the state Ballot Board, said he [consulted](#) major anti-abortion groups when crafting ballot language for Issue 1.

Republican congressional candidates Bernie Moreno and state Sen. Matt Dolan also opposed the amendment. Moreno has said he would vote for a federal ban, while Dolan joined the group of lawmakers who formally opposed Issue 1 after its passage.

**THE BEAT** *States Newsroom coverage*

## Missouri GOP continues to push anti-abortion bills despite ban



*Missouri Republicans are filing anti-abortion legislation. But state Democrats are pushing reproductive health care measures.*

*(Michael B. Thomas/Getty Images)*

Abortion is mostly illegal in Missouri. But the near-total ban hasn't stopped Republican lawmakers from filing more anti-abortion bills this year, [Missouri Independent](#) reports. GOP Sen. Andrew Koenig sponsored legislation that would make it illegal for employers to help staff get abortions elsewhere. Another bill filed by Sen. Nick Schroer would bar any abortion providers or affiliates from receiving Medicaid funding.

**Even anti-abortion activists doubt those measures will advance.** Campaign For Life director Sam Lee criticized two GOP senators who filed a bill last month that would let prosecutors charge women with murder for getting abortions. "It gives the perception that people who are pro-life don't care about women," Lee said.

**Some of the measures proposed this session attempt to help pregnant people and parents.** Democratic Sen. Barbara Washington hopes Republican Gov. Mike Parson's decision to allocate more than \$4 million into improving pregnancy outcomes could spotlight her legislation geared at lowering maternal mortality rates. Other reproductive health bills floating this year could mandate that insurers cover infertility treatments, require STD testing and mental health screenings during pregnancy and repeal taxes on menstrual products and diapers.

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# Arkansas crisis pregnancy centers seek taxpayer money for ads, maternity homes

Arkansas lawmakers passed a law in 2022 that sets aside a **\$1 million grant program for anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers**. Twenty-one out of the 29 centers applied for funding for the second year in a row, and officials are expected to allocate funding later this month, [Arkansas Advocate](#) reports.

**The centers, which promote alternatives to abortion, have requested money for maternity homes and advertising campaigns targeted at people searching online about unplanned pregnancies.** Other applicants have asked for money to pay staff, attend national conferences, fund parenting classes and get baby essentials — clothes, diapers and formula, for example.

Republican leaders in the state frame crisis pregnancy centers as necessary after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the federal right to an abortion in June 2022. Arkansas bans abortion unless a patient's life is at risk. **Some lawmakers say the anti-abortion centers can reduce infant, child and maternal mortality rates.** Arkansas has the highest rates of [maternal mortality](#) — 43.5 deaths for every 100,000 live births from 2018 to 2021 — and [teen pregnancy](#) — 26.5 births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19 in 2021 — in the U.S., according to federal data.

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## Mississippi post-Dobbs births didn't increase as expected

The number of babies born in Mississippi last year did not spike as expected. State health officials predicted there would be 5,000 more births annually after the Supreme Court's Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization ruling in 2022. But unplanned pregnancies increased in states that enacted bans post-Dobbs, according to the [Institute of Labor Economics](#). **Mississippi had the highest increase in unplanned pregnancies during the first half of 2023**, based on an analysis.

Births have been steadily decreasing in the state since 2007, [Mississippi Today](#) reports. But Mitchell Adcock, executive director of the Center for Mississippi Health Policy, said that number slowed in 2023. Adcock attributed the change to the near-total abortion ban. **There were just four reported abortions in Mississippi last year.** Aid Access, a telemedicine abortion pills provider, said it receives about 250 requests from residents each month. Experts said Mississippians are likely self-managing their abortions or traveling elsewhere for care.



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