

News From The States

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS TODAY

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By [Elisha Brown](#)



*Speakers at the 2024 March for Life rally in Washington, D.C. focused on crisis pregnancy centers, but factions of the anti-abortion movement are still pushing a federal ban.
(Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)*

Today is officially the 51st anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that established the federal right to an abortion. The March for Life has been held in Washington, D.C. annually by abortion rights opponents since the 1973 ruling.

But the past two years marked a turning point for the rally after the nation's high court struck down *Roe* in June 2022. The event on Friday focused on providing resources to anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers.

U.S. House Speaker [Mike Johnson](#), a Louisiana Republican, said he was the product of an unplanned pregnancy during his speech. Johnson also cheered two bills the GOP-held House passed last week that would limit the federal government from restricting funds to [anti-abortion centers](#) and increase resources for [pregnant college students](#). The measures are unlikely to pass in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

Despite the March for Life’s focus on anti-abortion centers, some abortion opponents are still pushing for a federal ban, States Newsroom’s Sofia Resnick [reports](#).

“I’m not okay with abortion states and non-abortion states. I want an abortion-free America,” said Right to Life of East Texas director **Mark Lee Dickson**, who appeared at a sparsely attended protest outside the White House on Thursday. Dickson has traveled across New Mexico and Texas encouraging municipalities to pass ordinances that restrict abortion-related travel or abortion medication.

Anti-abortion advocates hope **former President Donald Trump** will support a federal abortion ban if he wins the presidential race. “If we got Donald J. Trump back in the White House, he could end abortion in every single state in America, by enforcing the Comstock Act,” Dickson said.

The [Comstock Act of 1873](#) — which banned the mailing of anything deemed obscene or morally impure, such as abortion-inducing drugs — has been cited in the ordinances Dickson has backed in New Mexico. Congress watered down the power of the statute during the 20th century, but a version of the law remains on the books.

However, the anti-abortion movement is not united in calls for a national ban. [Republicans running for president have shied away from the issue](#), saying abortion policy should be left to the states.

Constitutional lawyer and anti-abortion activist **Catherine Glenn Foster** said state restrictions don’t do enough to help pregnant people. “Really, I don’t think we should be introducing any kind of ban without coordinating a corresponding joint effort to simultaneously provide resources and support — even beyond the issue of abortion,” Foster said.

THE BEAT *States Newsroom coverage*

Michigan Gov. Whitmer: Abortion rights will be ‘front and center’ in 2024 election



*Michigan Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has signed a number of reproductive health bills into law during her tenure.
(Andrew Roth/Michigan Advance)*

When Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer was re-elected in November 2022, her party gained control of the Michigan government for the first time in decades and [57% of Michiganders voted to codify reproductive rights](#). Since then, she has signed legislation that repealed a 1931 abortion ban and stopped insurers from requiring separate abortion riders, among other changes.

Ahead of the November election, Whitmer told [Michigan Advance](#) she's focused on underscoring the stakes of the presidential race. "I think abortion rights are going to be very front and center in this campaign," Whitmer said in an interview on Thursday. **President Joe Biden named the governor the co-chair of his 2024 re-election bid.** She traveled across the state last weekend rallying for his campaign.

Whitmer said a second Donald Trump presidency could result in a national abortion ban that would outweigh state-by-state legal protections: "A national ban would supersede these rights that we've been able to secure at the state level, and so it's absolutely crucial we do not have Donald Trump back in the White House." Trump has not publicly endorsed a federal ban, despite pressure from major anti-abortion groups, according to [The Washington Post](#).

Montana attorney general rejects abortion ballot initiative

Republican Attorney General Austin Knudsen rejected an abortion rights coalition's proposed ballot measure, saying it contains multiple subjects and inhibits public health, [Daily Montanan](#) reports. Montanans Securing Reproductive Rights submitted a ballot initiative to Knudsen's office in November aimed at placing an abortion rights amendment — the group wants to ensure access through fetal viability and later for emergencies — in the state constitution. **Deputy Solicitor General Brent Mead said in a [memo](#) released last week that the group logrolled several political statements into one initiative and limited the state's ability to regulate abortion.** “The choice to preclude the State from being able to enforce valid health and safety regulations is different than the choice to expand abortion rights,” Mead wrote.

Raph Graybill, a lawyer for the abortion rights group, told the Montanan they will keep trying to get the measure approved, even if that means taking legal action. “In an attempt to keep an abortion rights initiative out of the hands of voters, Attorney General Austin Knudsen has used the power of his office to put personal politics before a fair process to allow Montanans the opportunity to secure their reproductive rights,” Graybill said. The coalition has roughly a week to challenge the decision with the state Supreme Court, which has a history of affirming abortion access.

Alabama Democrats file bills challenging abortion ban

Democrats in Alabama introduced abortion measures last week that have little chance of passing in the state's Republican-controlled legislature. Sen. Vivian Davis Figures sponsored a resolution that would **ask voters to allow abortions up to fetal viability and later in pregnancy for medical emergencies**, [Alabama Reflector](#) reports. In the House, Minority Leader Anthony Daniels offered a bill that would **let sexual assault victims get abortions** and Rep. Chris England filed a bill that would **repeal a 1951 abortion ban**.

Reproductive rights advocates fear the pre-Roe statute — the law made it illegal to provide abortions or abortion-inducing drugs and includes penalties of up to a year in prison and a \$1,000 fine — would give officials leeway to prosecute women who get abortions. **Even though the Democratic-bills are unlikely to gain traction, West Alabama Women's Center executive director Robin Marty told the Reflector that the proposals still matter.** “I think that it is very important for people to understand how powerless they are,” she said. The state bans all abortions unless the pregnant patient's life is in danger. An amendment passed in 2018 declared the Alabama Constitution does not protect abortion rights.

THE PULL *Commentary from Tennessee*

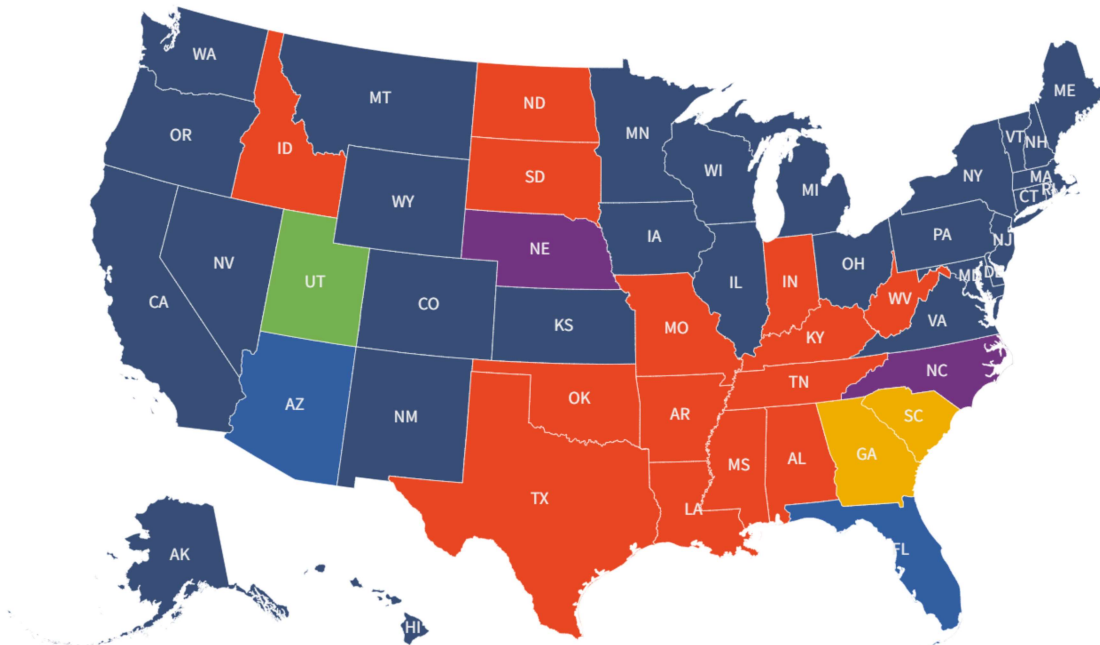
“The organization [No Labels] even equivocates on policy, stating of abortion in a tab marked ‘empathy and equality’: ‘America must strike a balance between protecting women's rights to

control their own reproductive health and our society's responsibility to protect human life.' To put it colloquially, this ain't it." — **J. Holly McCall**, editor-in-chief, [Tennessee Lookout](#)

THE PULSE *Reproductive rights news across the country*

- Missourians for Constitutional Freedom has raised more than \$1.1 million since launching its signature-gathering effort for an abortion rights petition last week. ([Missouri Independent](#))
- President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris are set to hold a rally in Northern Virginia on Tuesday as their reelection campaign emphasizes abortion rights. ([CBS News](#))
- Congressional Democrats introduced legislation to protect access to infertility treatments, part of a response to state measures seeking to categorize fertilization as personhood. ([CNN](#))
- Researchers say a new method could help predict the quality of embryos used for IVF. ([Stat News](#))
- Momentum for paid daily and medical leave policies is growing: More than a dozen states require paid time-off. ([States Newsroom](#))

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, and follow her on X [@elishacbrown](#).

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