

News From The States

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS TODAY

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By [Elisha Brown](#)



*Rep. Ed Lewis and other Republican lawmakers in Missouri are pushing bills that could make it harder to change the state constitution while campaigns are underway to restore abortion access.
(Courtesy of Missouri House Communications)*

Two of Missouri's top elected officials already tried to stall an abortion rights petition last year.

Now, Republicans are proposing legislation that would change the petition process by making it harder to amend the state constitution, [Missouri Independent](#) reports.

The bills GOP lawmakers are floating come as two dueling campaigns to restore various levels of abortion rights in the state are collecting petition signatures.

Rep. Ed Lewis proposed [changes](#) that would require constitutional amendments to receive a majority of votes statewide and in each congressional district. Missouri law only requires measures to receive 51% of the general vote to pass. And Rep. Mike Haffner [refiled](#) legislation that would invalidate petition signatures if ballot language changes and keep out-of-state residents from participating in the signature-gathering drives.

Some Missourians testified against altering the citizen-led initiative process at a Tuesday hearing. “It is horribly expensive and complicated as the dickens to pass an initiative petition,” said Sam Licklider, lobbyist for Missouri Realtors. His organization won successful ballot campaigns in 2010 and 2019.

Denise Lieberman, director and general counsel at the **Missouri Voter Protection Coalition**, said Haffner’s residency requirement is unconstitutional. “We believe it imposes unnecessary, and in many cases, superfluous regulations of initiative petitions that are simply intended to draw out the process and make it harder,” she said.

Deputy Secretary of State Trish Vincent testified in favor of the bill, which her office helped write. Last year, Republican Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft wrote ballot titles — which were contested — for a group’s petition seeking to allow abortion through fetal viability.

The courts rewrote half of his summaries, saying they were partisan and [misleading](#). Attorney General Andrew Bailey also tried to get the state GOP auditor to inflate the estimated taxpayer cost of the initiative. Ultimately, the Missouri Supreme Court [dismissed](#) his actions and ordered him to approve the fiscal note.

But court challenges did delay the Missourians for Constitutional Freedom’s signature-gathering process. The group [officially launched their campaign last week](#), according to the Independent. Supporters of both abortion petitions need more than 171,000 registered voters in most congressional districts to endorse their campaign by May.

Republican-led efforts to thwart citizen-initiated ballot measures extend beyond Missouri, [States Newsroom](#) reports. The GOP-controlled legislature in [Ohio](#) passed a measure asking voters to raise the threshold for amending the state constitution in August, just three months before a reproductive rights measure was set to appear on the ballot. However, 57% of Ohioans handily defeated that proposal. Secretary of State and Ohio Ballot Board Chair [Frank LaRose](#) later said he consulted anti-abortion groups when crafting summaries for the petition.

THE BEAT *States Newsroom coverage*

Republican Arkansas attorney general approves abortion rights petition after rejections



*The Arkansas attorney general accepted a citizen initiative seeking to restore abortion access up to 18 weeks.
(iStock / Getty Images Plus)*

Attorney General Tim Griffin approved the third draft of an abortion ballot measure after rejecting previous versions, [Arkansas Advocate](#) reports. If the group behind the petition collects some **90,000 signatures by July 5** and voters approve the proposed constitutional amendment, abortion would be legal up to **18 weeks of pregnancy** and later for physical health complications. The amendment would also allow abortions for rape, incest or fatal fetal anomalies. All abortions are illegal in Arkansas, except to save the life of the patient.

Arkansans for Limited Government thanked Griffin — a Republican who opposes abortion — for his decision and professionalism. “Today, we are one step closer to restoring the freedom that was taken from individuals when *Roe v. Wade* was overturned,” said Jim McHugh, the group’s treasurer. Griffin rejected the proposal twice, citing the need for explicit language and medical definitions, among other issues. “Any ambiguity in the text of a measure could lead to a successful court challenge,” Griffin wrote in his opinion released on Tuesday. “Significant changes in law often have unintended consequences that, if known, would give voters serious ground for reflection.”

Wisconsin governor vows to veto abortion restrictions as 14-week ban advances



*Democratic Gov. Tony Evers addressed the GOP-led Wisconsin Legislature.
(Baylor Spears/Wisconsin Examiner)*

Gov. Tony Evers pledged to veto any legislation that would diminish reproductive health care during his State of the State address, [Wisconsin Examiner](#) reports. Evers, a Democrat, delivered his speech Tuesday, hours after an Assembly committee approved a **bill that would ask voters if they want to ban abortion after 14 weeks of pregnancy**. The legislation is set to receive a floor vote today. He also urged the legislature to expand postpartum Medicaid coverage and said his administration will secure **over-the-counter birth control** access for residents insured by BadgerCare Plus, the state Medicaid program.

The 14-week ban's GOP sponsors added rape and incest exceptions to the proposal following backlash from Democratic lawmakers this week, according to the [Examiner](#). If legislators pass the bill and override Evers' promised veto, the measure would be on the **April primary ballot**. GOP Rep. Amanda Nedweski, the proposal's co-author, defended the bill during a recent hearing: "As a realist and a pragmatist, I authored this life-saving legislation to ask the people what they want, to find out where we truly are in this society."

Members of an **anti-abortion coalition have criticized the ban, arguing that Wisconsin's 1849 near-total ban is stronger**. "It's a strong pro-life law. It bans abortion from conception. We're trying to tighten it up. It has good criminal penalties," said Matt Sande, Pro-Life Wisconsin's director of legislation who [testified](#) against the bill. Last year, a lower court judge determined that the 19th century statute was unenforceable. Sheboygan's district attorney appealed to the state Supreme Court.

North Dakota judge denies request from doctors challenging abortion ban



*Red River Women's Clinic, which moved from North Dakota to Minnesota after Roe v. Wade was overturned, is one of the plaintiffs asking for a clearer health exemption in the abortion ban.
(Jeff Beach/North Dakota Monitor)*

A North Dakota judge denied a request from doctors seeking legal protection if they perform abortions to preserve a patient's health, [North Dakota Monitor](#) reports. **Abortion is illegal in the state unless pregnancy leads to a physical health problem.** Victims of sexual abuse and incest can get abortions up to six weeks' gestation, when most women don't realize they're pregnant. Penalties for breaking the ban include up to five years in prison, a \$10,000 maximum fine, or both.

Last year, providers sued the state over the health exemption, arguing that the language was vague. They asked a judge for a preliminary injunction to shield from prosecution doctors who perform abortions based on "**good-faith medical judgment**" to protect the health and life of a patient. South Central District Court Judge Bruce Romanick called the request "unusual" in his Tuesday ruling. He wrote that the request would be akin to changing the law, which is outside his scope. Plaintiffs said they were disappointed in the decision but will appeal.

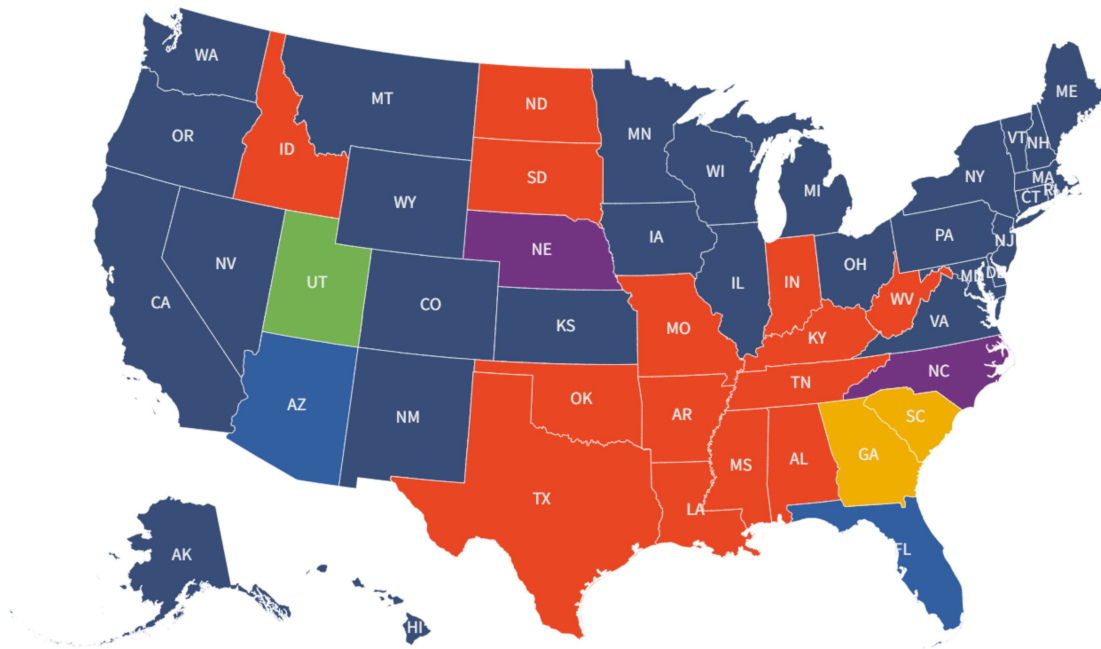
THE PULL *Commentary from Pennsylvania*

"I envision a future for Pennsylvania where every person has access to abortion care, can afford it, and feels no shame or stigma in seeking it. Roe never provided those things, and so it's time to set the old precedent aside and build a better, more inclusive future for sexual and reproductive health care." — **Signe Espinoza**, Planned Parenthood Pennsylvania Advocates executive director, [Pennsylvania-Capital Star](#)

THE PULSE *Reproductive rights news across the country*

- President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris placed abortion rights at the center of their reelection bid Tuesday during their first 2024 joint campaign rally. ([States Newsroom](#))
- Following public opposition, Idaho legislators tabled a bill that sought to replace the words “embryo” and “fetus” with “preborn child” in state laws. ([Idaho Capital Sun](#))
- Kentucky’s certificate of need requirements, which prevent freestanding birth centers from operating in the commonwealth, has prompted much debate. ([Kentucky Lantern](#))
- Pennsylvania Democrats unveiled legislation that could undo laws requiring clinics to meet the same regulations as ambulatory surgical centers and making providers get hospital admitting privileges. ([Pennsylvania Capital-Star](#))
- Abortion funds are dealing with legal instability, a decrease in donations and scammers looking for free trips. ([Stat News](#))

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



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