

News From The States

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS TODAY

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By [Elisha Brown](#)



*Doula care is associated with lower preterm and C-section birth rates, research shows.
(Getty Images)*

Officials in South Dakota will soon offer doulas Medicaid reimbursements for prenatal, delivery and postpartum care.

Matt Althoff, the state Department of Social Services secretary, told House lawmakers on Thursday that his agency hopes to start reimbursements for doula services in April for pregnant residents covered by Medicaid, [South Dakota Searchlight](#) reports.

“We’re going to take a very close exam and do all we can to expand coverage for doula services in our normal protocols and procedures posthaste — before even the end of the fiscal year,” Althoff said.

Roughly half of births in South Dakota are covered by Medicaid, and 37% of Medicaid recipients are Native American, according to [state data](#). The state also provides a year of Medicaid coverage for new mothers.

Studies show doula care leads to [better birth outcomes](#) — **lower rates of premature and C-section births**, for example — and is [cost-effective](#) for state Medicaid programs. Last year, South Dakota lawmakers set aside \$3.1 million for pregnant and postpartum Medicaid recipients.

THE BEAT *States Newsroom coverage*

Kansas GOP leaders pledge to introduce more anti-abortion legislation



*Kansas Senate President Ty Masterson (center) and House Speaker Dan Hawkins, the state's top Republicans, speak at an anti-abortion rally.
(Rachel Mipro/Kansas Reflector)*

During the Kansas March and Rally for Life on Wednesday, Senate President Ty Masterson and House Speaker Dan Hawkins told the crowd that they would continue to push additional restrictions. “This year, you’re going to see more from us,” Hawkins said. “And you’ll see more overrides because that’s what it will take.” Democratic **Gov. Laura Kelly has historically vetoed anti-abortion legislation**, [Kansas Reflector](#) reports. Republicans already introduced [bills](#) this year that would ban most abortions and abortion pills.

State law allows abortions up to 22 weeks’ gestation and later when the pregnant patient’s life is in danger. In 2019, the Kansas Supreme Court ruled that state **bodily autonomy rights safeguard the right to an abortion**. Voters soundly rejected an anti-abortion constitutional

amendment in August 2022, the first referendum on abortion after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Last year, lawmakers overrode Kelly's vetoes of several abortion laws, including one that would require providers to spread misinformation about an abortion pill reversal method. That law is blocked by the courts.

Maryland abortion rights advocates launch campaign for November referendum



Abortion rights advocate Erin Bradley, Maryland first lady Dawn Moore and Democratic Sen. Ariana B. Kelly attended a rally in support of the "Right to Reproductive Freedom" referendum on Jan. 22, 2024. (Bryan P. Sears/Maryland Matters)

The Democratic-led Maryland Legislature passed several reproductive health measures last year, including a **law shielding providers and patients from out-of-state investigations** and an **abortion rights resolution**. Reproductive rights advocates launched a campaign Monday to inform voters about the proposed constitutional amendment, [Maryland Matters](#) reports.

“We have the opportunity to send a strong message nationwide: Marylanders overwhelmingly demand their bodily autonomy and reproductive rights,” said Erin Bradley, chair of **Freedom in Reproduction-Maryland, the group spearheading the effort**.

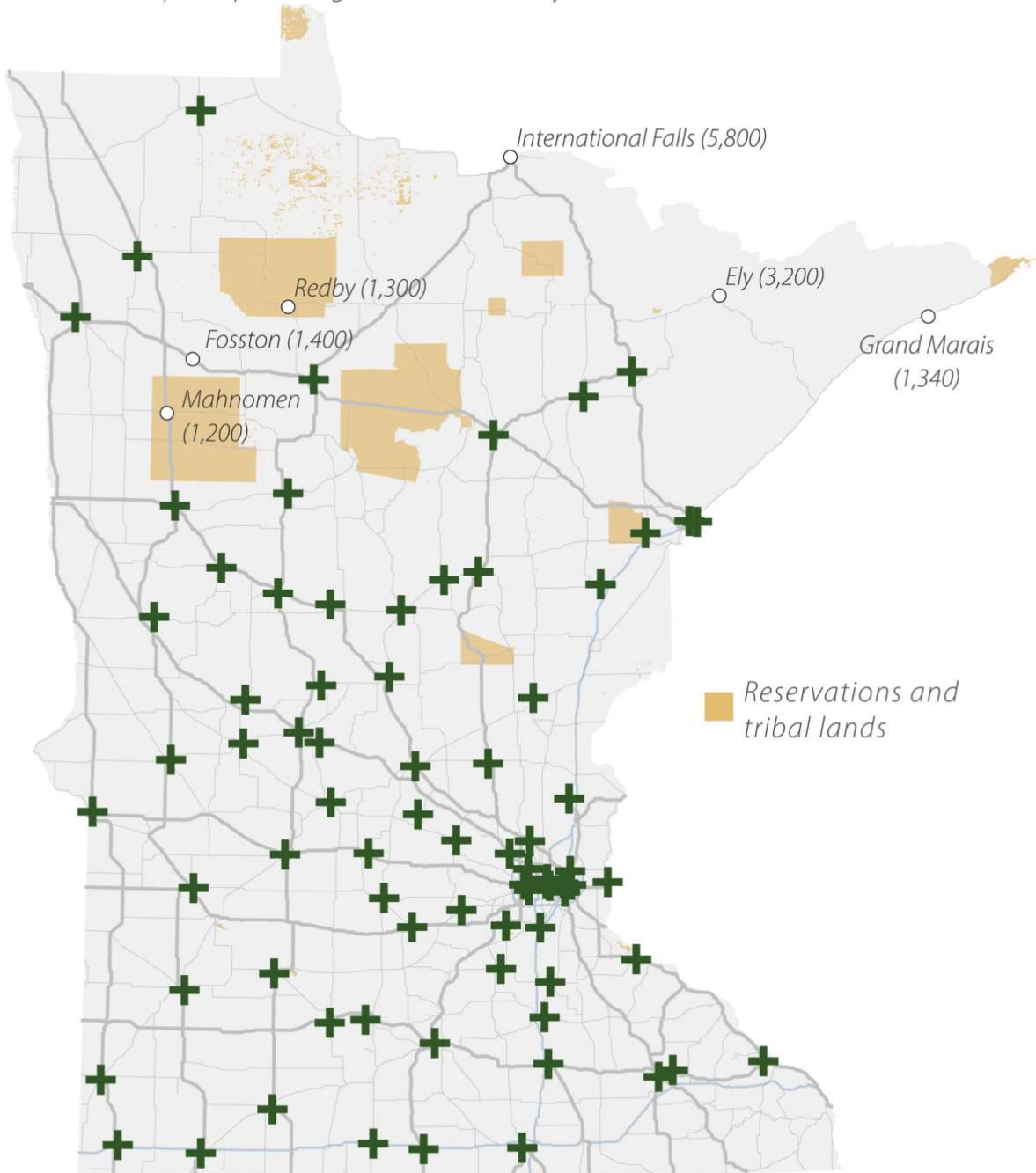
The state constitution already guarantees the right to abortion up to fetal viability — and beyond for fetal anomalies and to preserve a patient’s health or life — after 62% of voters approved the amendment in 1992. But the “Right to Reproductive Freedom” [proposal](#) doesn’t mention any gestational limits. **A group called Health Not Harm MD is urging voters to**

reject the new measure, saying it would harm parental rights. Deborah Brocato, the group's president, initiated an anti-abortion petition in 2022. Brocato's effort didn't get enough signatures to make the ballot.

Minnesota reportedly led nation in rural maternity ward closures from 2011 to 2021

Labor and delivery

Minnesota hospitals providing labor and delivery services as of Jan. 2024



Rural obstetrics units steadily closed around the nation during the previous decade, according to a December [report](#) by Chartis, a private health care consulting firm. **Twenty-two maternity wards closed in Minnesota's rural communities** between 2011 and 2021. Rural hospitals in Iowa, Texas, Wisconsin and Kansas also closed a high number of obstetrics units during that time period.

Another Minnesota hospital just announced plans to end labor and delivery services.

That means Fosston residents will have to travel 45 minutes to reach the nearest maternity ward, [Minnesota Reformer](#) reports. Just 76 hospitals deliver babies today — 22 years ago it was more than 100 — a decline that has especially affected the northern part of Minnesota and Indigenous people living on reservations or tribal lands. Hospital officials have cited staffing shortages and lower Medicaid reimbursements as reasons for the closures.

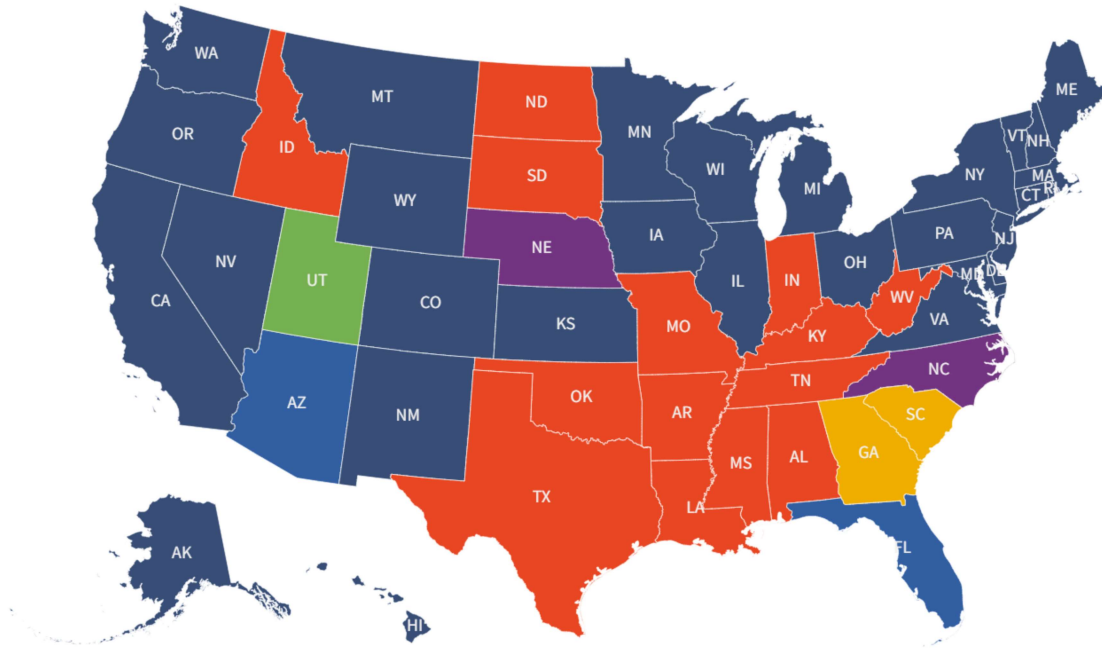
THE PULL *Commentary from Virginia*

“Take it from me, a mother of three and a postpartum depression survivor: Medication is nice, but guaranteed paid maternity leave and more compassion for mothers in the workplace would be even better.” — **Samantha Willis**, commentary/deputy editor, [Virginia Mercury](#).

THE PULSE *Reproductive rights news across the country*

- Missouri Republicans are trying again to block Planned Parenthood from receiving Medicaid funds. ([Missouri Independent](#))
- A Mississippi House resolution would reinstate citizen initiatives but bar abortion ballot measures. ([Mississippi Today](#))
- An Idaho Republican introduced a bill that would establish a maternal mortality review committee in state law. ([Idaho Capital Sun](#))
- Maternal health advocates in New York are urging legislatures to allow certified professional midwives, who specialize in home births, to practice in the state. ([Spectrum News](#))
- The White House invited Kate Cox, who sued Texas to terminate a nonviable pregnancy, to the State of the Union address. ([Texas Tribune](#))

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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