

News From The States

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS TODAY

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By Elisha Brown



*A Safe Haven Baby Box at a fire station in Alabama has received two surrendered infants since its installation in January. Both babies were evaluated at hospitals and put in state custody.
(Anna Claire Vollers/Stateline)*

Nearly two dozen states allow people to place unwanted newborns in so-called “baby boxes.”

These drop-off devices, typically installed at fire stations and police departments, have been promoted by anti-abortion advocates lately. But the boxes also have some bipartisan support, [Stateline](#) reported.

The “baby box” concept works in tandem with safe haven laws, which allow parents to surrender newborns to authorities without punishment unless the child was abused.

At least 19 states have baby drop-off devices, first developed by a nonprofit called Safe Haven Baby Boxes in Indiana. Monica Kelsey, the organization's founder, is an anti-abortion advocate and adoptee. Kelsey's products cost about **\$20,000 to install**, and the nonprofit charges a \$500 annual service fee. Indiana has 115 of the nation's 200 boxes.

“I do think women and men are scared when they get into a moment of crisis and they freak out, not knowing what to do,” Kelsey said. “We're out there in the public every single day, educating and bringing awareness that they have options, so when they do have a crisis, they will come to us.”

Lawmakers in at least 15 states have introduced “baby box” legislation this year for their use. Adoption advocates and legal experts have warned against the devices, dismissing them as gimmicks that don't solve real issues affecting parents and babies.

“I think what legislators hear is, ‘If you don't do this, there will be dead babies abandoned on the streets of your city,’” said Gregory Luce, a Minnesota attorney and founder of the Adoptee Rights Law Center. “They don't want that to happen on their watch, whether they're Republicans or Democrats, so they pass it without further investment in prenatal or postnatal services for women, or mental health services, or services for women in crisis.”

Santa Clara University law professor Michelle Oberman said states with the boxes should improve data collection on how many newborns are surrendered, and lawmakers should draft legislation to support parents in crisis.

“It feels to me like such a limited and heartless response to say, ‘We don't care that you're unhoused, addicted or mentally ill — just drop off your baby and we'll let you go on your way,’” Oberman said.

THE BEAT *States Newsroom coverage*

Ohio advocates fear impact on WIC program as partial government shutdown looms

Congress has until March 1 to reach a deal on federal funding or the country will face a partial government shutdown. In Ohio, advocates are worried about the fate of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (**WIC**) program, which **provides food benefits and breastfeeding resources to pregnant people and children** in need.

Hope Lane-Gavin, director of nutrition policy and programs for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, said **states may have to put people on the WIC waitlists or reduce benefit amounts** if the program isn't fully funded by next month. “We can not afford to absorb the

loss in WIC,” Lane-Gavin told [Ohio Capital Journal](#). She said **food banks don’t receive much infant formula** — it’s hard to work around expiration dates and storage specifications.

Even if the federal government approves the program’s current funding levels, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates there would be a \$1 billion shortfall. As a result, about **2 million Americans could be rejected from the program this year**, according to a Center for Budget and Policy Priorities [analysis](#).

GOP Texas governor said he supports IVF

Republican Gov. **Gregg Abbott** indicated that he supports access to in vitro fertilization, the [Texas Tribune](#) reported. “Texas is a pro-life state, and we want to do everything possible that we can to maintain Texas being a pro-life state,” Abbott told [CNN](#) over the weekend. “But at the very same time ... we as a state want to ensure that we promote life, we bring more life into the world and we empower parents to be able to have more children.”

Abbott’s comments follow the **Alabama Supreme Court’s unprecedented ruling** earlier this month that classified embryos as “unborn children.” The decision has led several fertility clinics in the state to pause IVF treatments, according to [Alabama Reflector](#). Some [embryo shipping services halted transfers](#) to and from the state.

In the Alabama case, plaintiffs sued a fertility clinic over frozen embryos a hospital patient accidentally destroyed by invoking a 19th century **wrongful death statute**. A similar law is at issue in a [lawsuit](#) in Texas, where a man sued three women, accusing them of helping his wife get an abortion. Lawyers for a Galveston man are arguing that the defendants caused the death of a fetus by “murdering” the plaintiff’s “unborn child with illegally obtained abortion pills,” according to a [complaint](#). A [trial](#) in that case is set for May.

THE PULL *Commentary from Alabama*

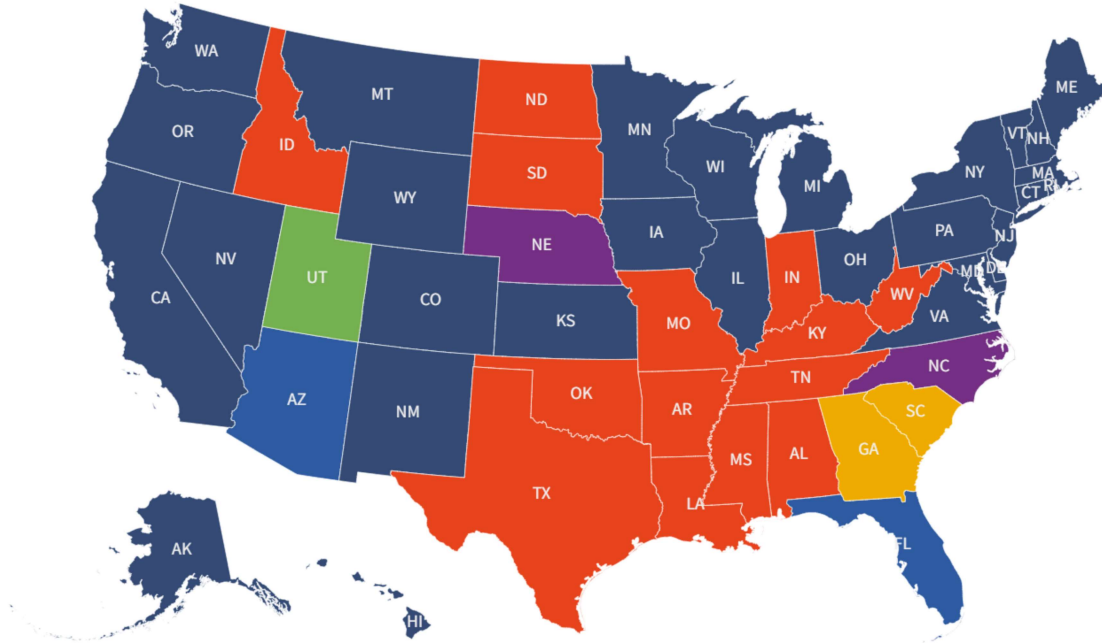
“Your views don’t matter. The pain of those wanting children is irrelevant. It’s all about eight judges making the world conform to their tendentious readings of the law.” — **Brian Lyman**, editor-in-chief, [Alabama Reflector](#)

THE PULSE *Reproductive rights news across the country*

- California Gov. Gavin Newsom’s PAC launched a series of national TV ads targeting lawmakers who are pushing restrictions on abortion-related travel. ([Politico](#))
- More than 100 U.S. House Republicans backed legislation introduced in 2023 that would define life as starting from the moment of fertilization. ([The Washington Post](#))
- Doctors said the Alabama court decision defining embryos as “unborn children” could cause embryologists to restructure the entire IVF process, increase financial costs for patients and impose liability concerns for providers. ([HuffPost](#))

- Elizabeth Carr, the first person born via in vitro fertilization in the U.S., reflected on the Alabama ruling, which has made her “feel like an endangered species.” ([WBUR](#))
- One round of IVF can cost roughly \$20,000, making the treatment inaccessible to many Americans. ([KFF Health News](#))

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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