

News From The States

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS TODAY

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By [Kelcie Moseley-Morris](#) and [Elisha Brown](#)



Jennifer Vollstedt was pregnant for the second time in 2016 after her first pregnancy was diagnosed with a fatal chromosomal condition. Her son is now 6.

(Courtesy of Jennifer Vollstedt)

Editor's note: This is the third installment of an occasional States Newsroom series called [When and Where: Abortion access in America](#), profiling individuals who have needed abortion care in the U.S. before and after Dobbs.

Jennifer Vollstedt and Ariel Cavanaugh-Okhah have never met, but they are connected by fatal [chromosomal abnormalities](#) that affected their wanted pregnancies, and the stress and heartbreak that comes with it.

WHEN AND WHERE?

Abortion access in America

Their experiences of needing to terminate their pregnancies were quite different. One took place before the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling overturned the federal right to abortion nearly two years ago, while the other occurred just a few months after.

They are separated by nearly 1,500 miles. Vollstedt lives in Wisconsin. Cavanaugh-Okhah is in southern Florida. In some states, like Wisconsin, abortion restrictions were already in place before *Roe* fell, but the procedure was still accessible.

After June 2022, patients and providers found themselves trying to navigate a [patchwork](#) of laws in 14 states that implemented strict or near-total abortion bans, some from any gestational age. Access suddenly became largely dependent on location, with some clinics in bordering states less than an hour away and others more than a 12-hour car ride.

Vollstedt got pregnant for the first time at 27 in December 2014, not long after her wedding. She couldn't wait to tell friends and family. She called her grandfather to share the news over FaceTime, just weeks before he died.

"He was really excited, he loved babies," Vollstedt said.

Her doctor ordered standard blood work and other lab tests. But while she was on a family vacation in Florida a few days later, a geneticist called.

"They said my results from the blood test were actually very concerning," she said.

Read more at [News from the States](#).

THE BEAT *States Newsroom coverage*

Republicans in Arizona and Wisconsin stall efforts to secure birth control rights



Democratic leaders in Arizona, like Gov. Katie Hobbs, and Wisconsin are urging Republican-controlled legislatures to protect access to contraception. Bills that would secure those rights haven't gained much traction.

(Gloria Rebecca Gomez/Arizona Mirror)

Democrats in two battleground states where Republicans hold legislative power want to secure access to birth control.

Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs recently questioned the GOP's support for contraceptive access. "This basic, commonsense proposal hasn't made it past step one," Hobbs said. "It begs the question: Why won't they codify this basic freedom into law? What do they have against allowing us to have control over our own bodies and access to basic health care?"

The Right to Contraception Act would protect the right to birth control, including emergency contraception, and ban any attempts to restrict access to pregnancy prevention, according to [Arizona Mirror](#). Hobbs made the bill's passage a top priority in her executive budget, but it has yet to receive a hearing in either chamber.

When asked about the proposal, **Republican state Sen. Sonny Borrelli implied that women wouldn't need birth control if they stopped being promiscuous.** "Like I said, Bayer Company invented aspirin. Put it between your knees," Borrelli said. Senate President Warren Petersen told the Mirror that the party is addressing issues their constituents care about, like immigration and the economy, not contraceptives.

In Wisconsin, Democrats are renewing an effort to codify the right to birth control, but the state Senate session is about to wrap up soon. A bill with the same name as the legislation proposed in Arizona has yet to receive a vote, [Wisconsin Examiner](#) reported.

"Republican attacks on bodily autonomy are reaching far beyond abortion access," said Minority Leader Dianne Hesselbein, the bill's sponsor. "But the last thing we can afford to do is be complacent, we cannot wait until it is too late to take action. We must take action to protect contraception access and protect people's medical freedom."

Reproductive rights advocates have been concerned that legal challenges to birth control could follow the U.S. Supreme Court’s reversal of Roe v. Wade. In Justice Clarence Thomas’ concurring [opinion](#) for Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, he suggested that the court should revisit pivotal due process rulings, such as Griswold v. Connecticut, a 1965 case that gave married couples the right to use contraception.

Kentucky Democrats walk out in protest of ‘alternatives to pregnancy termination’ bill



*State Reps. Adrielle Camuel, Rachel Roarx and Lindsey Burke spoke with reporters after they walked out of a committee hearing to protest an abortion-related bill.
(Sarah Ladd/Kentucky Lantern)*

Three state lawmakers refused to vote on a bill that would push palliative care options on people with nonviable pregnancies, [Kentucky Lantern](#) reported. Democratic Reps. Adrielle Camuel, Rachel Roarx and Lindsey Burke walked out of a committee hearing Thursday to express opposition to the proposal. Language in Republican Rep. Nancy Tate’s [bill](#) states it’s intended to support “alternatives to pregnancy termination.”

The measure would require health insurers to cover perinatal palliative care for stillborns and babies expected to die shortly after birth. Providers would also have to recommend “assistance with the creation of memories and keepsakes” if the bill becomes law. Tate, an abortion rights opponent, said the legislation is compassionate and gives lawmakers a chance to support women and their families.

Burke, who recently shared her [infertility struggles](#) with colleagues, disagreed. “It shames mothers who are losing children,” she said. “Rather than providing them with the full scope of medical treatment that they need, it guilts them into following a prescriptive plan.” In January,

Burke introduced bills that would restore abortion access in the commonwealth. They're unlikely to move in the GOP-dominated legislature.

Despite the protest, a House committee approved Tate's legislation. **Doctors testified that the bill would duplicate care already available.** "Although perinatal hospice is an important service, it is already something offered by all hospitals in the state that have an obstetrical service line under the name Perinatal Bereavement," wrote Dr. Elizabeth A. Case in a letter to legislators.

Michigan senators hear testimony on reforming surrogacy laws



*Legislation sponsored by Democratic Rep. Samantha Steckloff would legalize surrogacy contracts in Michigan, the only state in the country that bans them.
(Anna Liz Nichols/Michigan Advance)*

Democratic Rep. Samantha Steckloff is continuing her effort to reform surrogacy laws in Michigan. Steckloff's **Fertility Health Care Act** would remove barriers to surrogacy in the state and add protections for surrogates, parents and children, [Michigan Advance](#) reported. The House passed the package of bills in November.

"Michigan is the only state in the nation with a criminal ban on surrogacy contracts," Steckloff said during a Senate hearing last week. "Driving these arrangements underground only serves to put prospective parents and children they hope to raise in legal jeopardy."

Reforming surrogacy laws is personal for Steckloff, whose battle with breast cancer inhibited her ability to naturally conceive. After chemotherapy, she underwent IVF “so that one day I might be able to have a family of my own.”

Under the proposals, a surrogate must be 21 or older, have given birth previously, complete medical and mental health evaluations, and have a lawyer who would be paid for by the prospective parents throughout the contract process. Another bill in the package would amend older laws to reflect the rights of children born through surrogacy when it comes to issues like inheritance and getting copies of their birth certificates.

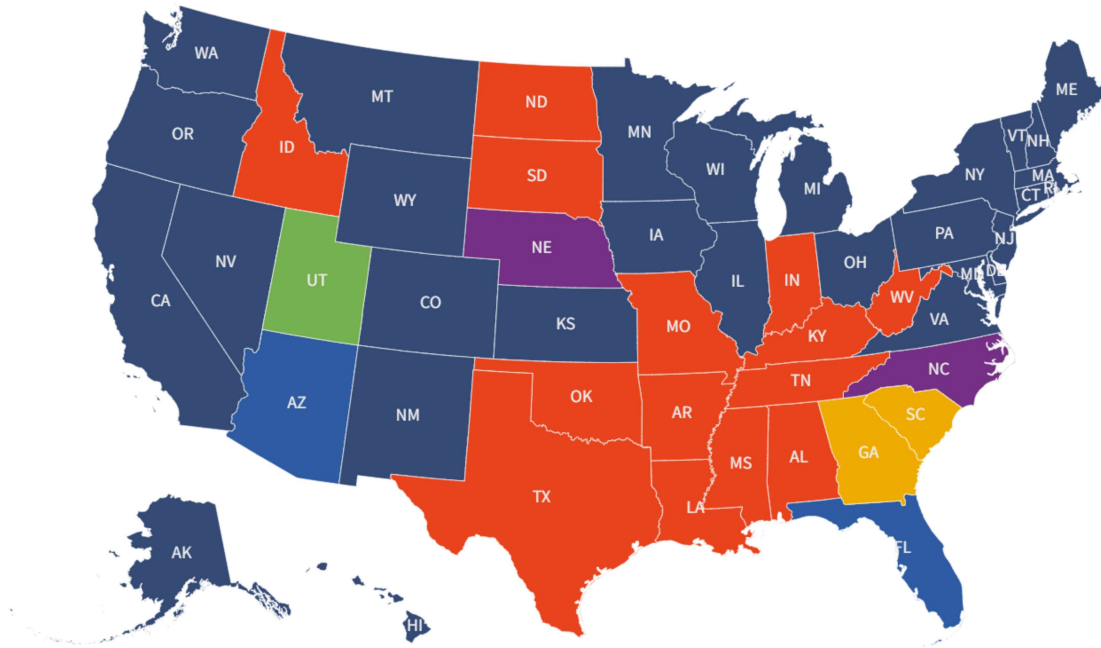
THE PULL *Commentary from Alabama*

“If every lawmaker who voted for the short-term IVF bill agrees to pass legislation that would allow another vote on the ‘Sanctity of Life’ amendment, then we can see if this is truly the will of the people and not just the fanatical beliefs of a far-right court.” — **Robin Marty**, executive director of West Alabama Women’s Center in Tuscaloosa, [Alabama Reflector](#)

THE PULSE *Reproductive rights news across the country*

- Iowa House lawmakers passed a bill that would increase penalties for “nonconsensual” fetal deaths and mulled a proposal that would require child support payments before a baby is born. ([Iowa Capital Dispatch](#))
- Mississippi’s agricultural commissioner said a bill geared at protecting IVF would lead to “back door abortion and possible cloning.” ([Mississippi Today](#))
- The Alabama Supreme Court’s IVF ruling has factored into the race for a Maryland U.S. Senate seat. ([Maryland Matters](#))
- Legislation to address the syphilis crisis in Missouri, where 81 babies were born with the disease in 2022, has bipartisan support. ([Missouri Independent](#))

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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