

News From The States

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS TODAY

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By [Sofia Resnick](#), [Madison McVan](#) and [Elisha Brown](#)



*Volunteer abortion doula Mary Cross, a retired nurse who works for Planned Parenthood Arizona, sometimes offers scented oils to help patients relax.
(Jerod MacDonald-Evoy/Arizona Mirror)*

A 39-year-old single mother of two got up extra early on a recent Wednesday morning, hoping to be one of the first outside the Planned Parenthood clinic near Phoenix, Arizona.

The upside of not telling anyone about her abortion was that she wasn't going to have to explain herself. The downside was that she couldn't receive any pain medication, since she'd have to drive herself home. After scraping together \$770 to pay for the procedure — \$250 of which she said came from an abortion fund — she couldn't afford an Uber for the 80-minute round trip. So she was overcome with relief when not only did the busy clinic not turn her away, but a retired nurse named Mary Cross offered to be her abortion doula, free of charge.

“I was very, very happy that she was in the room,” said the patient, who asked not to be named, given the stigma and legal uncertainty around abortion in the U.S. (Abortion is currently mostly legal in Arizona through 15 weeks’ gestation, amid ongoing litigation over an 1864 law banning abortion.) “I wanted to keep [the abortion] as private as possible, but it still isn’t something that you want to go through alone without sedation.”

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022 was a turning point for the reproductive health community, and the public at large. A longtime operating room nurse, Cross now had free time and an urge to get involved.

“I’ve always had a choice of what I wanted to do with myself, with my career, with my body,” said the 70-year-old from Tempe. “And now here I was a retired nurse, and the law changed. That really was the trigger that sent me to be more involved in a hands-on kind of way.”

Cross started attending regular conference calls hosted by Planned Parenthood to learn about ways to get involved. At one of those meetings, Planned Parenthood Arizona nurse Kischea Talbert talked about a program she was developing to offer free doula services to patients at their clinics.

“My ears perked up immediately,” Cross said. “I started thinking, ‘That’s something I could do. That’s something I have a skill set for.’ So I texted her right away.”

Doulas are trained, non-medical patient advocates, typically associated with pregnancy and childbirth and end-of-life care. But there’s a [growing movement](#) in the U.S. to have advocates provide physical and emotional support to other potentially high-anxiety reproductive health services, such as abortion and miscarriage management, as well as for Pap smears and birth control insertion, which Talbert said can be challenging for patients with past sexual trauma.

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

THE BEAT *States Newsroom coverage*

VP Kamala Harris calls for access to abortion during historic visit to Minnesota Planned Parenthood



*Vice President Kamala Harris became the first sitting vice president to visit a clinic that provides abortions in St. Paul on Thursday, March 14, 2024.
(Madison McVan/Minnesota Reformer)*

Vice President Kamala Harris toured a St. Paul Planned Parenthood clinic Thursday, in what is thought to be the first visit by a sitting president or vice president to an abortion provider. Her “Fight for Reproductive Freedoms” tour is meant to highlight the consequences of abortion bans, [Minnesota Reformer](#) reported.

Minnesota’s Democratic-Farmer-Labor-controlled Legislature passed some of the [strongest abortion protection laws](#) in the country last year, while leaders in nearby Republican-dominated states restricted or banned abortions entirely.

Harris said Thursday the closure of reproductive health care clinics was an “intended consequence” of the Supreme Court ruling. “I’m here at this health care clinic to uplift the work that is happening in Minnesota as an example of what true leadership looks like,” he said.

U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson says IVF policy should be left to the states



U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson said he supports IVF but believes the states should handle protective measures.

(Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

Congress should not be involved in legislation preserving access to in vitro fertilization, said U.S. House Speaker **Mike Johnson**, a Louisiana Republican. “I think this is being handled by the states,” he said Thursday. Johnson also said he supports IVF. “That’s a remarkable thing and it’s something we ought to protect and preserve,” he said. “And I think our party is certainly committed to that.” His comments came as **fallout from the Alabama Supreme Court decision** that said embryos are “unborn children” continues to shape national debate, [States Newsroom](#) reported.

Democratic congressional members responded to the [Alabama ruling](#) by trying to pass bills that would shield **assisted reproductive technology**. Last month, Illinois Democratic Sen. **Tammy Duckworth** tried to get unanimous consent for a protective measure, which [failed](#) after Mississippi Republican Sen. **Cindy Hyde-Smith** blocked it. Sen. **Patty Murray**, a Washington Democrat, sought approval this week to expand access to infertility treatments for military service members and veterans. GOP Oklahoma Sen. **James Lankford** [blocked](#) that effort. House Republicans in competitive races for reelection — Oregon Rep. **Lori Chavez-DeRemer** and California Rep. **Michelle Steel**, for example — have introduced non-binding resolutions supportive of IVF.

Arizona Republicans block vote on contraception access bill

Democrats in Arizona attempted to force a vote Wednesday on legislation that would guarantee access to contraception, but Republicans unanimously blocked the effort. The maneuver followed Democratic Gov. **Katie Hobbs** scolding of GOP lawmakers last week, [Arizona Mirror](#) reported. Hobbs has said protecting the right to birth control is a priority; she questioned why the **Right to Contraception Act** had not moved in the legislature. Republican lawmakers hold a one-seat majority in each chamber.

House Majority Leader Leo BIASIUCCI was the only GOP lawmaker who spoke out against the move. “There are rules, there are processes and a way for bills to go through the House,” he said. Senate Majority Leader Sonny Borrelli recently dismissed efforts to shield access to birth control. “Like I said, Bayer Company invented aspirin. Put it between your knees,” he told the [Mirror](#) last week. Democratic Sen. Anna Hernandez shot back at Borrelli’s comment when pressing her colleagues to hold a quick vote on the measure. “Contrary to what some of us believe, aspirin is not the answer to health care. Contraception is,” she said.

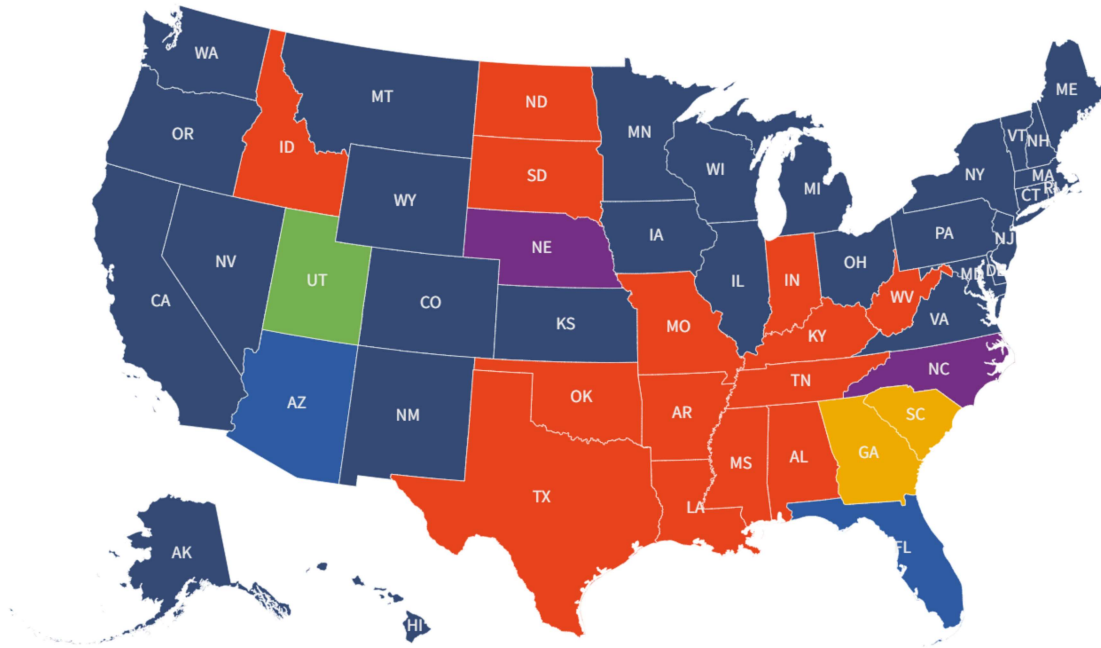
THE PULL *Commentary from North Carolina*

“It is my hope that fellow Christians can come together to support people who can become pregnant, honor and protect all reproductive options, and advocate for full abortion access. Abortion is never going anywhere because it has always been here. I pray this is something we can embrace.” — **Tara Corbett**, Pro-Choice board member and faith-based activist, [NC Newsline](#)

THE PULSE *Reproductive rights news across the country*

- Abortion access could be a factor in races for two open Montana Supreme Court seats this fall, when an abortion rights initiative could also be on the ballot. ([KFF Health News](#))
- Texas Medical Board to weigh abortion ban exemptions. ([Texas Tribune](#))
- Americans struggling with infertility who live in states with abortion restrictions are making contingency plans if limits are placed on IVF. ([The 19th*](#))
- Influential anti-abortion groups, such as the Heritage Foundation and Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, are pushing lawmakers to regulate IVF treatments. ([The Washington Post](#))
- A new study suggests that federal data may have overestimated the U.S. maternal mortality rate. ([NPR](#))

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



Open this interactive map in your browser

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