

# Bill Aims to Codify Women's Health Protections

April 5, 2023 **by Dan McCue**



Graffiti outside the U.S. Supreme Court. (Photo by Dan McCue)

WASHINGTON — House Democrats have introduced a bill that would create a national right for women to have an abortion and safeguard their decision-making process.

Reps. Judy Chu, D-Calif., Lois Frankel, D-Fla., Ayanna Pressley, D-Mass., and Veronica Escobar, D-Texas, introduced H.R. 12, the Women's Health Protection Act of 2023, in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling last year in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

In that ruling a conservative majority of justices on the court held the U.S. Constitution does not automatically confer a right to

abortion and said the question of abortion access and regulation should be left up to the states.

Since then, the bill sponsors said in a press release, abortion care has become wholly inaccessible in 14 states, leaving nearly 18 million women of reproductive age without abortion access in their home state.

“These attacks on reproductive health care continue, with anti-abortion Republican lawmakers at the federal level pushing for a nationwide ban and at the state level pushing for new laws to arrest doctors, punish women seeking abortions and those who help them, and criminalize interstate travel to obtain abortion care,” the sponsors said in a joint release.

The Women’s Health Protection Act would create a federal statutory right for health care providers to provide abortion care and a corresponding right for their patients to receive that care, free from bans and restrictions that impede access.

The legislation would also protect the ability to travel out of state for abortion care.

A companion bill has been introduced in the U.S. Senate by Sens. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.

“Every person — no matter their circumstances or how or where they became pregnant — deserves dignity, safety, and care in seeking an abortion,” Chu said in a written statement.

“Last summer, in an instant, an extremist Supreme Court ripped away the bodily autonomy of half the American population,” she continued. “The Women’s Health Protection Act fights back by creating a federal right to abortion care, free from state-level abortion bans that chip away at reproductive freedom, and by moving us toward a nation of true equality.”

“Lawmakers have an obligation to protect the basic rights of the people we serve,” said Rep. Abigail Spanberger, D-Va., one of the many cosponsors of the bill in the House.

“Until the Supreme Court erased a woman’s right to privacy and reproductive health care, the right to safe and legal abortion was settled law in the United States for nearly five decades. In the months since, we have seen anti-abortion politicians endeavor to — and succeed in — stripping away the constitutional rights of millions of American women,” she said.

“Women in Virginia and across our country deserve the freedom to make decisions about their own bodies. I’m proud to once again support the Women’s Health Protection Act to restore the right to privacy and restore a woman’s right to choose,” Spanberger added.

Nancy Northup, president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights, a legal advocacy group that promotes abortion rights around the world, said in a statement that “Congress can restore what the Supreme Court has broken.

“Since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, women and pregnant people are being denied the care they need across the country. We are in the midst of a public health crisis that will only get worse,” Northup said.

“This bill has never been more necessary than it is today, and the addition of new provisions will protect the right to travel across state lines to seek care and protect people who assist others in securing abortion care. The time to pass the Women’s Health Protection Act is now,” she said.

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