

# Senators Say State Abortion Ban Causing Exodus of Women's Health Care Providers

May 22, 2024 **by Dan McCue**



Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., leads a Capitol Hill press conference on abortion rights, Tuesday, May 21, 2024.

WASHINGTON — A trio of Democratic senators assailed abortion bans in Republican-led states on Tuesday, pointing to a new report that suggests those laws are forcing women's health care providers to turn away patients, shut down practices and abandon those states altogether for fear of prosecution for practicing their profession.

Sens. Patty Murray, D-Wash., Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., and Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., laid out their case about what they called the "disastrous" repercussions of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision during an early morning press conference in a shaded area near the Senate side of the U.S. Capitol.

*Dobbs*, of course, is the high court's 2022 decision that overturned the abortion protection enshrined for 50 years by the court's earlier ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, a decision that inspired lawmakers in a string of red states to significantly tighten their restrictions on abortion.

Joining the senators at their press conference were Dr. Michael Belmonte, a D.C.-area OB-GYN and fellow with Physicians for Reproductive Health; Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley, CEO of Power to Decide; and Karen Stone, vice president of public policy and government relations at Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

The press briefing comes on the heels of new **data** from the AAMC Research and Action Institute, which found that, for the second year in a row, graduating medical students are less likely to choose residency programs in states with abortion bans or severe abortion restrictions.

The analysis found a 4.2% decrease in the number of applicants for residency programs in states with near-total abortion bans. For OB-GYN residency applicants, states where abortion is banned saw a 6.7% decrease in the number of applicants.

Also this month, polling from **CNBC/Generation Lab** found that nearly two-thirds of respondents between 18 and 34 would "probably not" or "definitely not" live in a state that banned abortion, and 45% of respondents said they would "definitely reject" or "probably reject" a job offer located in a state where abortion is illegal.

"I know that Republicans keep hoping the fallout from their dangerous abortion bans will just kind of go away, but the painful reality for families across the country is that this Republican health care crisis is only getting worse," said Murray, who, along

with Baldwin, is a lead sponsor of the Women's Health Protection Act, which would restore abortion rights nationwide.

"There are new horror stories every day of people who are seeking an abortion, wanting to make their own health care decision, and finding out that they no longer have a choice because Republicans already made it for them," she continued.

"Health care providers in many states are being put in impossible situations every single day. Instead of being able to help patients who need an abortion for any reason, their hands are tied by politicians, and in many cases, even a woman's life or health is in jeopardy," Murray said. "The doctors have to say, 'Sorry, come back later.' 'We can't act until you are sicker.' Or 'We can't help you until you are at death's door.' It is heartbreaking ... especially when, really, you just want to be able to do what is best for your patients."

Referring to the AAMC Research and Action Institute study, Murray said the findings "should not be surprising to anyone."

"After all, why go somewhere where politicians and judges can overrule your medical degree and force you to put your patients in harm's way?" she said.

"Why practice in a state that threatens you with the loss of your license, heavy fines and even prison time, if you dare to help a patient get the abortion care that they need? It's yet another example of the dangerous chaos that Republicans' extreme, anti-abortion policies have unleashed," Murray said.

Baldwin, who also co-sponsored the Reproductive Health Care Training Act with Murray, a bill that would establish a new grant program to expand and support comprehensive training in abortion care, said, "The stark reality is that since Republicans

overturned *Roe v. Wade*, women have been stripped of the right to decide what is best for their families and it's led to dire impacts.

"We've heard stories of women being left to bleed out or developing life-threatening infections before they could get care, jeopardizing their lives and their future fertility," she said.

"Sadly, the consequences don't stop there," she continued. "Now, we're seeing fewer doctors choose Wisconsin to start their careers, which means fewer doctors to deliver babies and fewer doctors to give necessary routine care."

Before *Dobbs*, Baldwin said, women in Wisconsin already faced long drives and wait times to find OB-GYN care, and over 40% of the state's rural hospitals simply did not provide obstetric services.

"Since *Roe* fell, things are only getting worse," she said. "In Wisconsin and other states with abortion bans, universities have been forced to send their medical students out of state to receive reproductive care training.

"I've heard from doctors who are commuting across state lines because they can no longer provide comprehensive care in their own communities. And having fewer OB-GYNs in our state reaches beyond our immediate discussion about abortion, we're losing critical care for half our population.

"As a result of these state laws, we have fewer OB-GYNs to deliver babies and perform prenatal and postnatal checkups, and to ensure moms and babies get the healthy start that they deserve."

Kelly said abortion bans in his home state not only have restricted the rights of Arizonans, but have also created chaos

and uncertainty for women and doctors.

“Right now, as Arizona whiplashes between two abortion bans, physicians are choosing not to come to our state and others are considering leaving, putting women’s lives at risk,” Kelly said.

“I’ve spoken to several doctors who are thinking about leaving the state and many already have; I’ve actually had Zoom calls with doctors during which I could see cardboard boxes piled up behind them,” he continued.

“We know physicians are choosing not to come to Arizona because of our restrictive laws. Residency applications in Arizona decreased by nearly 20% from 2023 to 2024. And OB-GYN applications dropped by more than 25%. The only way to fix this is by codifying abortion rights into law once and for all,” Kelly said. “The majority of folks in the state of Arizona support abortion rights. We have to fix this. And I hope we will.”

McDonald–  
Mosley, of Power  
to Decide, an  
abortion rights  
advocacy group,  
said that as a  
health care  
provider, she  
knows how to  
deliver high-  
quality,  
evidence-based  
care to her  
patients.

Karen Stone, vice president of public policy  
and government relations at Planned  
Parenthood Federation of America, during a  
Capitol Hill press conference on Tuesday.

“I trained for years to do so,” she said.

“Over the last two years, I have seen more patients who have traveled hundreds and even thousands of miles to get care with me,” the Maryland-based doctor said. “And those are the ones who are able to reach me. There are so many more we know cannot.

“This is not just a problem in states with bans. Wait times for appointments in states that have protections for abortion access — like my home state of Maryland — have increased as we do our best to care for as many patients as possible,” she said.

Belmonte, a practicing OB-GYN in Washington, D.C., said he’s proud to work in an office that continues to provide a “full spectrum of reproductive health care, which includes abortion care, contraceptive care, as well as prenatal and maternal health care.”

“Nevertheless, the impact of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Dobbs* has been profound,” he said. “In response to medically unnecessary and extreme state laws, the increasing threats of criminalization and threats to our medical licensure and livelihood, training opportunities in sexual and reproductive health care have severely diminished and are difficult to access where they do exist.

“In fact, the data shows that the restrictive state laws that have been adopted have had severe consequences for communities,” he said. “The survey we’ve been referencing found nearly 60% of participants said they’d be unlikely to apply to residency programs in states that restrict abortion, and residency applications in states with the abortion restrictions have fallen the hardest in the area of OB-GYN residencies.

“I’m fearful for what that means for the provider workforce, especially when coupled with the reality that existing provider

shortages have been exacerbated by abortion bans, as well as by multiple ongoing public health crises, harming communities who already faced the most barriers to care,” Belmonte said.

Stone, of Planned Parenthood, said the organization hears every day from providers across the country about the challenges they are facing on the front lines of what clearly is a public health crisis.

“Doctors are being forced to wait for lawyers to declare patients sick enough before medical intervention. Some could face prison time just for doing their job to support pregnant people navigating impossible logistics to basic, necessary health care,” Stone said.

“Abortion providers are heroes and public officials have a responsibility to ensure they can do their jobs to the best of their ability, free from interference from politicians, judges and those with a different viewpoint,” she added.

Toward that end, Murray is also the lead sponsor of the Let Doctors Provide Reproductive Health Care Act, which would protect abortion providers in states where abortion remains legal from Republicans’ attempts to restrict their practice and create uncertainty about their legal liability.

“Pass our legislation to finally restore *Roe*,” Baldwin said.

“Let women decide what is best for them. Not the federal government. Not state governments. Women,” she added.

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