REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE TASK FORCE
Supporting Access to Abortion in the Aftermath of Dobbs

November 2023
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Dear Colleagues in the YWCA Movement,

The 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision in the case of Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization reversed the long-standing precedent of Roe v. Wade and opened the door for states to roll back access to abortion care. Since then, we have heard—and in many cases witnessed—the direct, dire impact of the Court’s decision on the lives of women and all people who can become pregnant. Countless stories detail the emotional, physical, and economic impact of taking away women’s—especially young women’s—ability to choose if and when to become a parent.

We need to say it out loud: Policies that block access to abortion are deadly, more so for women of color and low-income women. As an organization committed to gender and racial justice, we cannot hide from the very real impacts of these harmful policies no matter where we live.

To better understand the specific challenges local YWCA associations are facing in the wake of the Dobbs decision—and to identify resources and potential solutions to support our network—YWCA USA convened the Reproductive Justice Task Force in early 2023, comprised of 20 local association leaders. Over the course of the Task Force’s meetings, we dove deep into identifying specific challenges that local YWCA associations are facing in this changing political and cultural environment—from limitations on operations and services, to board governance concerns, to understanding the parameters of allowable advocacy and communications activities that 501(c)(3) organizations are permitted to undertake—particularly around contentious cultural and political issues.

In response to this work by the Task Force, this document is the first in a series of practical, effective resources for the YWCA network as you navigate the post-Dobbs terrain—resources tailored for and by the experience and genius of the YWCA network itself in the spirit of peer-to-peer learning and collaboration. Here we share:

Reproductive Justice is…

…the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.

…about access, not choice. Even when abortion is legal, many women of color cannot afford it, or cannot travel hundreds of miles to the nearest clinic. There is no choice where there is no access.

…not just about abortion. Abortion access is critical, and women of color and other marginalized women also have difficulty accessing contraception, comprehensive sex education, STI prevention and care, alternative birth options, adequate prenatal and pregnancy care, domestic violence assistance, adequate wages to support our families, safe homes, and so much more.”

From SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collaborative
• A new timeline, graphic, and overview that connects the work of YWCA to the issue of abortion

• Messaging guidance to help your YWCA address abortion issues using language that resonates with your community and your YWCA

• Guidance on advocating for and engaging your communities in support of abortion rights and access, with embedded hyperlinks to examples of other YWCA associations’ work, as well as resources created by YWCA USA and other organizations

As we move forward, YWCA USA will collaborate with the Task Force and the newly-launched Abortion and Reproductive Justice Advocacy Community to identify information, resources, and support that would better enable local associations to more fully engage in the reproductive health and justice space. Along with more examples from the network, we look forward to sharing additional resources, including: guidance on working with YWCA boards to support abortion rights and reproductive justice, the dos and don’ts of GOTV issue advocacy around abortion during election cycles, and tips and strategies to address fundraising and safety concerns.

The Reproductive Justice Task Force wants to be responsive to the networks’ needs—this is an iterative and evolving process. We need and want to hear from you: Share your inputs and feedback about how the Task Force can support your reproductive justice work by emailing advocacy@ywca.org and by sharing your thoughts in the new Abortion and Reproductive Justice Advocacy community.

In partnership

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• Kathleen Marker, CEO, YWCA Northeast Kansas, RJTF Co-Chair
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II. YWCA AND ABORTION RIGHTS

MORE THAN 50 YEARS OF YWCA SUPPORT FOR ABORTION RIGHTS

1967  YWCA adopted this statement at its 1967 convention: “A woman has the right to choose in the matter of abortion based on her own religious and ethical beliefs and her physician’s guidance.”

1970  YWCA voted to support the REPEAL OF ANY LAW THAT PROHIBITS abortions performed by a licensed physician.

1979  YWCA voted to SUPPORT PUBLIC FUNDING for abortion, pre-abortion, and post-abortion care.

1988  YWCA adopted HEALTHCARE — INCLUDING ABORTION and other reproductive health care — as one of five national policy priorities.

1991  YWCA added advocating AGAINST PARENTAL NOTIFICATION and consent laws.

2003  The National YWCA Public Policy Program included support for abortion rights in its review of matter of public policy that are important in the realization of the mission and goals of YWCA.

2017  YWCA USA continued to demonstrate support for reproductive health care — including abortion — in its Defend Affordable Care Act Fact Sheet. YWCA USA also issued various press statements to this effect (including Planned Parenthood Statement, Another Attack on Women’s Reproductive Health and Executive Order Further Erodes Access to Reproductive Healthcare).

2019  YWCA USA led a coalition letter which specifically calls for Congress to prioritize women’s health, including reproductive health.

2021  YWCA USA led an amicus brief joined by 3 national partners in the case of Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, which highlighted the impact abortion bans would have on young women, particularly young women of color. Read our press release.

2022  YWCA USA’s CEO Margaret Mitchell issued a statement marking the historic nomination of a Black woman to the Supreme Court of the United States which included YWCA USA priorities, including the “protection of abortion rights.”
Connecting YWCA’s Work and Mission to the Issue of Abortion

“What does abortion have to do with YWCA’s work and mission?” is a recurring question from network leaders and community members that the Task Force has grappled with. Drawing on research from The Turn-Away Study, the World Health Organization’s Safe abortion: technical and policy guidance for health systems (2d ed.), the American Psychological Association, and amicus briefs filed in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, this overview shares insights about how having access to or being denied an abortion can impact women’s lives with respect to racial justice, economic security, child care, safety from gender-based violence, and mental and physical health. This overview is not intended as public messaging or talking points; rather, it is intended as an internal thought piece to help individuals within the YWCA network understand how abortion relates to various aspects of our work and mission.
What does abortion have to do with YWCA’s work in the areas of...

**Racial Justice**

For many reasons, including systemic racism and misogyny, women of color bear the greatest burden when it comes to economic insecurity, limited access to child care, gender-based violence, and poor health outcomes. Blocking access to abortion worsens these impacts for women of color.

- Women of color are more likely to be primary breadwinners and in lower wage jobs, compounding the impact of limited access to affordable, high-quality child care.
- Black women in the United States are 3-4 times more likely to experience a pregnancy-related death than white women.
- The homicide rate during pregnancy and the postpartum period among non-Hispanic Black women is more than 5x the rate among White women.
- Women of color have less access to reproductive and maternal health services, including contraception and maternity care generally.
- Compared to white women, Black women are more likely to be uninsured, face greater financial barriers to care when they need it, and are less likely to access prenatal care.

Black women are more likely to face policy and structural barriers that inhibit their ability both to access abortion care and to have healthy pregnancies – policies like paid sick days, pay equity, affordable health insurance, access to contraception and freedom from pregnancy discrimination at work – that compound the impact of these intersecting issues in their lives.
Economic Security

Access to abortion is associated with:

- Higher high school graduation
- Higher college entrance
- Higher labor force participation
- Higher-paying jobs
- Greater economic security
- Ability to make different decisions about education, the timing of marriage and family formation, and careers.

Lack of access to abortion is associated with:

- Higher likelihood to report having insufficient money to pay for basic living needs like food, housing, and transportation.
- Higher likelihood of being forced to leave school or training programs and derail academic and career paths.
- A lower credit score
- More debt
- More negative public records, like for bankruptcy and eviction
- Higher likelihood of being forced to switch to limited or part-time work to accommodate pregnancy and/or child care.
- Due to time off for pregnancy/new baby, lost salary, lost retirement savings, lost benefits, and the lower likelihood of reentering the workforce.
- Higher likelihood of living below the poverty level
- Higher likelihood of being unemployed.
Child Care

High-quality child care is hard to find and very expensive.

- There are already too few spots available in high-quality child care settings for young children now.
- Women who are forced to proceed with a pregnancy will struggle to find and secure high-quality, affordable child care.
- When mothers cannot access affordable child care, many end up taking part-time jobs or leaving the workforce altogether.
- Low-paid jobs are less likely to have paid parental leave or predictable and flexible work schedules, often forcing parents to leave their jobs to take care of children.

Safety from Gender-Based Violence

Being pregnant is dangerous for survivors. Unintended pregnancy carries higher risks of domestic violence, and homicide is the leading cause of pregnancy-associated death in the United States. In addition, pregnant survivors of abuse are at a 37% higher risk of developing obstetric complications.

Seeking abortion care can be dangerous and challenging for survivors.

- Abusers may threaten harm for seeking abortion
- State laws that require people seeking abortion to notify their spouse or partner put survivors at risk.
- State laws that force women to “prove” rape or incest to access abortion care can delay abortion care beyond legal limits, barring women from accessing care altogether.

Forced pregnancy is harmful for survivors. Being forced to carry a pregnancy to term is re-traumatizing because it takes away survivors’ power and control once again. And having a child with an abusive partner exacerbates economic dependence and creates new legal rights and obligations that connect the victim and abuser for years.
**Mental and Physical Health**

Being denied access to an abortion harms women’s mental and physical health before, during, and after birth.

**Denial of access to abortion care is associated with:**

- Delayed prenatal care, which can result in higher incidence of maternity-related and infant health problems.
- Poor maternal bonding — feeling trapped as a mother, resenting their baby, or longing for the “old days” before they had the baby.
- More life-threatening pregnancy complications like high blood pressure, seizures, and bleeding after delivery
- More chronic headaches or migraines
- More joint pain
- More anxiety and loss of self-esteem
- Higher infant mortality rates

**On the other hand, women who have abortions commonly report feeling relief and do not experience negative mental health problems.**

**SOURCES**

- [https://www.ansirh.org/research/ongoing/turnaway-study](https://www.ansirh.org/research/ongoing/turnaway-study)
- [https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/19/19-1392/193052/20210920164243798_19-1392%20Brief.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/19/19-1392/193052/20210920164243798_19-1392%20Brief.pdf)
- [https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/19/19-1392/192992/20210920145519814_19-1392_Amicus%20Brief.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/19/19-1392/192992/20210920145519814_19-1392_Amicus%20Brief.pdf)
- [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/70914/9789241548434_eng.pdf;jsessionid=7D7261384A06937FFF02CB773EE86FBE?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/70914/9789241548434_eng.pdf;jsessionid=7D7261384A06937FFF02CB773EE86FBE?sequence=1)
III. TALKING ABOUT ABORTION
MESSAGING FOR YWCA ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Tailoring our messaging and talking points for specific audiences is an essential step for each YWCA as we navigate the post-Dobbs political and cultural environment. This document offers messages you can adapt and use in your communication with partners, donors, and the public, based on the context of your community.

We recommend starting with the Core Messages—which are appropriate for any audience—and then choosing additional supporting messages when responding to specific situations or reaching specific stakeholder audiences. Most importantly: choose the messages that resonate most deeply and are most appropriate for your community, your audience, and your YWCA.

If you have questions or need additional guidance for your communication efforts, reach out to communications@ywca.org.

How to Use this Messaging

Some of the messaging points provided in this document will resonate with your association’s goals in this work, and some will not. We encourage you to adapt the content to best suit your association’s unique voice. As you consider ways to utilize this resource and select the core and supporting messages for a particular communications effort, it may be useful to consider some or all of these questions:

1. **Who is your audience?** Examples could include donors, your followers on social media, attendees at an event, the readers of your local newspaper, etc.

2. **Why do you want to talk to that audience?** What are your goals for putting this communication into the world? Examples could include rallying a base audience or drawing an audience of mixed support into the conversation.

3. **Will the tactic(s) you are considering (op-ed, social media, a blog, a speech, etc.) help you reach your intended audience?** Will the messaging help you to advance your intended goal or strategy? For example: To reach a younger audience, you may consider X or Instagram; to reach older generations, you may consider Facebook. To reach an audience with mixed views, you may choose a local or...
statewide newspaper; to reach a supportive audience, you may use your association’s blog, etc.

4. **How do I tailor our message for my YWCA’s unique voice and community?** Consider who is delivering the message: One of the most important things to consider is the credibility of your messenger for your audience. For example, co-authoring an op-ed on Mifepristone with a medical professional could lend additional credibility to your argument and help you better reach your intended audiences with your intended message.

5. **What are the points that will resonate in your community?** Consider the nuances of the community you serve. Will the tone, words, and phrases resonate with members of your community who may be on the fence about the Dobbs decision, or alienate them? Are there community concerns or issues to be sensitive to in your messages? Using the points in this document as a guide, consider rephrasing or using different terminologies to meet your audience goals.

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**TIP**
Remember, it is always important to keep your 501(c)(3) non-profit status as an association in mind as you determine what you want to say publicly. In an election year, be careful about raising policy issues that your association has not previously worked to advance—stick to the issues you have a track record working on. Learn more about these guidelines here.

**TIP**
Abortion access is an issue for people across the gender identity spectrum. In addition to “women,” terms you may consider while messaging to broad audiences might include: Pregnant-able people; abortion patients; abortion-seeking people, and more. Additional recommendations can be found in this guide developed by the Trans Journalist Association.
Core Messages

These messages are appropriate for all audiences. You can lead with a core message that matches the tone and approach your YWCA is comfortable using, and then pivot to a supporting message (below) that is specifically tailored to the audience you are trying to reach or situation to which you are responding.

- Polling has consistently shown that voters across all political affiliations believe abortion should be legal.\(^1\)
  - Most Americans believe that the *Roe v. Wade* decision was correct and that there should be reasonable access to an abortion.\(^2\)
  - A majority of voters (61%) think the *Dobbs* decision was a bad thing.\(^3\)
- Americans do not want lawmakers developing abortion policy based on extreme positions.\(^4\)
- New laws banning or severely limiting access to abortion are extreme:
  - They eliminate reasonable access to abortion care.
  - They substitute the judgment of political donors in place of personal health care decisions.
  - They perpetuate sexism and racism, and harm women’s health, safety, education, and economic futures.

Additional Supporting Messages

Supporting messages have been refined to appeal to specific audiences or to respond to a specific situation. Build on the core message you want to uplift with supporting messages.

Abortion Rights and YWCA

- For more than 50 years, YWCA has supported access to abortion care.
- YWCA’s mission of eliminating racism and empowering women cannot be accomplished if women are unable to control the course of their own lives.

Abortion is essential to women’s empowerment (for “friendly” audiences):

- Eliminating racism and empowering women cannot be accomplished if women are unable to control the course of their own lives.
- The decision of whether to continue a pregnancy is central to a woman’s life, her well-being, and her dignity.
- Restricting a woman’s ability to control the course of her life limits her ability to obtain and hold employment, complete her education, and have long-term stability and success in life and work.
- Being safe and free is fundamental to a woman’s individual empowerment.
Access to abortion care is essential to women's autonomy (for “friendly” and “conservative” audiences):

- Women should control whether and when to have children. That should not be a decision imposed on women by others.
- All opinions about abortion are welcome, but you cannot force that opinion on others.
- When the government controls personal decisions for a woman, she is being treated as less than a fully adult human responsible for her own choices.
- We need to trust and value women to make their own decisions for themselves and their families – including if and when to have a child.

Messaging for Conservative Audiences

Republicans and independents support reasonable access to abortion

- Across all political affiliations, nearly 70% of Americans believe that abortion should be legal.⁵
- According to Republican National Committee polling in September 2022, 80% of voters across all political affiliations did not agree with the Dobbs decision.⁶
- That same RNC poll proves that most independent voters and most Republicans believe that exceptions must exist to support the life of the mother and instances of rape and incest.⁷
- Abortion policy should not adhere to the extremes. Opinions on abortion have reflected the support for reasonable access for the last four decades.⁸

Government Overreach/Trampling of Individual Liberty

- Women should control whether and when to have children. That should not be a decision imposed on women by others.
- All opinions about abortion are welcome, but people cannot force their opinions on others; that's invasive and government overreach.
- We often talk about governments not trampling on people's individual autonomy. Allowing every individual to decide how to handle their health care decisions is an individual freedom.
- Women deserve to make personal health care decisions free from government interference.
Messaging for General and Friendly Audiences

Americans support abortion rights:

- In a recent Ipsos poll across all political affiliations, nearly 70% of Americans believe that abortion should be legal.  

- The majority of Americans believe that policymakers are developing policy based on what a select set of political donors want and not what the majority of people want — safe and legal access to abortion.  

- Exceptions in instances of rape, incest, and the life, health, and safety of the mother are supported by most Americans, but by themselves are not sufficient to ensure reasonable access to abortion care. Exceptions are particularly inadequate for women who experience domestic violence, as they often face unfair and high burdens of proof to demonstrate that they have been raped by a spouse or dating partner.

Most Americans oppose the Dobbs decision:

- Most Americans agree striking down Roe v. Wade was not a good decision. 

- Public opinion in the United States has shown support for reasonable access to abortion for the last four decades. 

- The issue of abortion was a top priority in the 2022 midterm elections, with 27% of voters stating that abortion was the most important issue in deciding their vote, coming in only behind inflation at 31%. 

- Meaningful access to abortion must be reasonable. Bans during early pregnancy are effectively complete bans, which Americans do not want.

Extreme State Bans

- Laws that ban abortion after six weeks (often referred to as “heartbeat bills”), as well as those with 12- or 15-week restrictions, are extreme measures that only “allow” abortions during very limited time periods before many women are aware they are pregnant and can secure medical care. These laws often lack exceptions for rape, incest, or a mother’s life, health, and safety.

“Middle-Ground” Rebuttal

- Regardless of what some lawmakers say, there is no middle ground when it comes to banning or severely limiting access to abortion care.

- Overwhelmingly, it is white, male lawmakers who are leading the anti-abortion fight at federal and state levels—lawmakers who want to ban abortion but not fix the systems that have and continue to oppress and marginalize women, with even greater repercussions for Black and brown women.
Abortion bans and new post-Dobbs restrictions are harmful

- Health:
  - Being denied access to abortion is associated with poorer health outcomes for women, including higher rates of anxiety, depression, and maternal morbidity, as well as higher infant mortality rates.\(^{16}\)

- Gender-Based Violence:
  - Unintended pregnancy carries higher risks of domestic violence and having a child ties survivors to their abusers. Denying access to abortion only further harms survivors of violence.

- Economic Consequences
  - The United States deprives families of universal health care, affordable and accessible child care, and paid medical and family leave. New abortion restrictions and all-out bans strip women of the ability to choose whether and when to have children and can exacerbate their economic struggles.
  - According to new research by the Economic Policy Institute, nearly all of the 26 states that have implemented new abortion restrictions or all-out bans have lower minimum wages, unionization levels, lower access to Medicaid and unemployment benefits, and higher rates of incarceration than states with more lenient abortion policies. \(^{17}\)
  - Abortion bans are NOT “pro-life.” They are anti-women. They are anti-child. A woman whose pregnancy has passed her state’s abortion ban time limit will be forced into motherhood in a country that fails to provide the most basic policies and supports for women, children, and families: paid maternity leave; job-protected, paid sick and medical leave; and affordable and accessible child care and health care.

Abortion bans and extreme restrictions perpetuate racism and sexism

- Don’t be fooled by the passing of laws that “allow” abortions only during very limited time periods before many women are aware they are pregnant and can secure medical care. These new abortion restrictions allow the government to intercede on a choice that is not theirs to make and perpetuates the United States’ history of racism and sexism. These restrictions deny and violate a woman’s right to bodily autonomy.
### Additional Resources from National Organizations that Focus on “Left of Center” Audiences and “Rallying the Base”

- **From SisterSong:** The right to have kids (or not), to survive, and thrive is universal, and one of the basic building blocks of liberation. When we fight for reproductive justice, we show up for people who are harmed the most. Reproductive justice builds economic, social, and political power for our communities, even as we struggle in systems that were never meant for us to survive. This movement saves lives.

- **From Repro Freedom Convo Guide** (All Above All Action Fund, Emily’s List, NARAL, PPAF, Voto Latino Action Fund): Restrictions and bans on abortion fall hardest on those already facing the most significant barriers to accessing care due to systemic racism and inequity, including people of color, those working to make ends meet, members of the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants, young people, those living in rural communities, and people with disabilities.

- **From NARAL:**
  
  - I, like most Americans, believe that personal decisions about pregnancy should be made by the person who is pregnant, with the support of the people she loves and trusts, not by politicians trying to control us.
  
  - Once someone has decided to seek abortion care, I want them to be able to have access to safe and affordable medical care. I want them to be supported, not restricted by laws that dictate their decision or place unnecessary barriers on the process.

### Key Words When Defining our Side and Describing our Values

- Reproductive freedom
- The freedom to decide
- Personal decisions
- Empathy and compassion
- Safe, accessible, supported
- Equity and justice

### Key Words When Describing Restrictions and Defining the Opposition

- Controlling
- Self-interest and political gain
- Invasive/Intrusive
- Politically motivated
- Political interference
- Taking away options
- Criminalizing doctors and patients
IV. ADVOCATING FOR AND ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN SUPPORT OF ABORTION ISSUES

The Task Force heard a clear call for advocacy support in its initial meetings. Advocacy encompasses a wide range of activities that change over time, from working with the media to getting people to the polls to directly lobbying elected officials. And when the advocacy relates to politically and culturally sensitive or divisive issues, questions and concerns often arise.

Here we offer multiple ways for local associations to support abortion access — and to push back against abortion bans — based on your own political, financial, and social context. In as many places as we are able, we share hyperlinks to stories, tools, and resources that local YWCA associations have used to support their advocacy for abortion rights and access.

Think of this as an invitation to enter this work and begin or continue institutionalizing reproductive justice in your association’s everyday efforts to eliminate racism and empower women. Whether your YWCA is already leading sophisticated abortion advocacy campaigns or just beginning to explore, we strive to meet associations where you are. This section is structured to allow the reader — you — to identify where you fall within an ongoing cycle of engagement required to achieve sustained narrative and policy change on abortion rights.

We recommend you first review the information about assessing internal capacity to do this work. Then, check out the information and resources to guide you in diving into the work based on your organization’s readiness. The cycle that follows offers four key actions your association can take — many with examples from local YWCAs. Some are more resource- and skill-intensive than others, but there is something for everyone.

As always: let us know what you need. Email advocacy@ywca.org and join the Abortion and Reproductive Justice Advocacy Group to ask questions and give feedback.
Assessing Your Organizational Readiness for Advocacy

Advocacy is often incremental, requiring a sustained commitment to achieve policy goals. The following questions can help you gauge whether your staff and board are ready and willing to dedicate energy and resources toward abortion rights advocacy.

Does your association have:

- An internal policy on advocacy activities and engagement?
- A policy agenda that explicitly mentions abortion? (Click the hyperlinks to read about two YWCAs that do!)
- Financial resources dedicated to policy advocacy — and the flexibility to use those resources on abortion issues?
- Staff or volunteers assigned or dedicated to policy advocacy, including advocating for abortion rights and access?

You don’t need to get to “yes” on all these questions to undertake advocacy, but changing a “no” to a “yes” is a good place to start and can strengthen your ability to engage in advocacy even more deeply. This may require internal education with your staff and board about how abortion access ties into your other programmatic priorities and why it is important for your association to take a stand. YWCA’s historical timeline and resources connecting YWCA’s work and mission to the issue of abortion (see above!) are great resources for these conversations.

Other steps you can take include forming a Public Policy Committee on your board of directors, or training your staff and board on policy advocacy best practices so they feel more prepared to engage in this work.

Assessing Your Organizational Readiness to Address Abortion

There may be other conversations that need to be had to ready your organization to talk about abortion rights differently and embed the work in your organization. Here, too, a good place to start is with education: Invite experts to speak with your staff and board about abortion, how it works, who gets abortions and why, how different rules and regulations affect women’s experiences, and how abortion bans have a disparate impact on women of color, trans and non-binary people, and other marginalized groups.

Maybe your board members are not fully on board with the organization taking a stance on abortion rights, or key funders or community partners have expressed concerns. Education and one-on-one conversations can go a long way to helping them understand the impact of this issue on the people you serve and your mission. Thinking long-term, consider vetting new staff and board members to ensure value alignment (example vetting language from one local YWCA association is here).

Safety and security are often top-of-mind for YWCA leaders. Take time to consider your organization’s policies related to building access and even how to engage with protesters if they come to your site.

And don’t forget: the new Abortion and Reproductive Justice Advocacy community is a great place to bring your questions and challenges — and to learn from your colleagues across the network.

Check out this tool for more support in determining if and how to expand your association’s policy advocacy work.
Doing the Work

As you read through the ideas and examples that follow, keep in mind that this is iterative work. You may decide to do multiple activities now, and then add and remove activities down the road based on capacity and the policy environment in your community. You may decide to do one new thing or do one thing differently. That’s great! The goal is to start doing more than you are doing now to make your voice heard.

Be a Source of Information in Your Community

Your association can be a source of information for people who need help accessing abortion care or legal supports. Share the following resources broadly:

1. If someone needs abortion care: abortionfinder.org
2. If someone needs help paying for abortion care and/or transportation/child care to access care: abortionfinder.org
3. If someone is being criminalized related to pregnancy or abortion and needs legal support: reprolegaldefensefund.org

In addition, your association likely already shares information about a variety of key issues and policies. Refine your messaging to emphasize abortion access and the impact of restrictions on the people you serve. Educating members of the media, who serve as informal decisionmakers, is an important part of this, too.

1. Decide how to talk about abortion (tips here and here from national abortion rights organizations)
2. Write a blog post like the ones you can read here and here from local YWCAs in TX and PA
3. Host a panel discussion (NE Kansas) or townhall on reproductive justice
4. Include in your e-newsletter like you see here from YWCA Boulder
5. Write and place an op-ed in local media (Lancaster)(Boulder)
6. Make a video (Lancaster)
7. Post about abortion rights and access on your social media platforms (Lancaster)
8. Host a march or rally (make sure you put out a media advisory and press release, and help your rally speakers prepare)
9. Collect and share stories of the impact of abortion bans and abortion restrictions
10. Hire a marketing and communication consultant.

For more help with advocacy communication, read this.
Work in Coalition with Reproductive Justice and Abortion Rights Organizations

There are almost certainly other organizations in your community, region, and/or state already working to protect abortion access. Join forces: there is strength in numbers and combining resources will allow you to do more, faster — following the lead and guidance of those that provide or advocate for abortion care and other reproductive justice services day-to-day.

Here is just a sample of national organizations with a local and/or state level presence to consider reaching out to if you’re not already connected:

- Abortion fund: abortionfunds.org/need-abortion/
- Planned Parenthood advocacy and political organizations: plannedparenthoodaction.org/local/get-involved-locally
- ACLU affiliates: aclu.org/about/affiliates
- Advocates for Youth Abortion Out Loud project: advocatesforyouth.org/abortion-out-loud/
- In Our Own Voice: National Black Women’s Reproductive Justice Agenda state partners: blackrj.org/about-us/our-partners/
- Indivisible group: indivisible.org/groups
- National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum chapters: napawf.org/membership/#chapters
- Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity campus groups: urge.org/chapters/

Abortion policy is constantly changing. Bookmark the following website so you can quickly find the latest information:

- Center for Reproductive Rights Abortion by State: reproductiverights.org/maps/abortion-laws-by-state/
- Brennan Center for Justice State Court Abortion Litigation Tracker: brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/state-court-abortion-litigation-tracker

Here is a list of national organizations working on the issue — these organizations are excellent resources for information on policies, messaging, health care delivery, and more.
Get to Know Decisionmakers in Your Community

Educating and engaging policymakers requires ongoing, intentional effort and strategy. So where do you start?

1. **Get to know them.** Attend events where they are present, invite them to your events, follow them on social media, and familiarize yourself with their staff.

   - Not sure where your members of Congress stand on abortion? Find out here: [plannedparenthoodaction.org/congressional-scorecard](http://plannedparenthoodaction.org/congressional-scorecard)
   - Live in a conservative state or community? Check out this YWCA USA resource: [EXPANDING OUR REACH: Engaging politically conservative policymakers as allies in our advocacy](https://sixrepro.org/)
   - Find state legislators who have a demonstrated commitment to reproductive rights: [https://sixrepro.org/](https://sixrepro.org/)

2. **Request a meeting.** Prepare talking points and select who will join you in person or virtually. Bring materials about your association to leave behind and send the information electronically as a follow-up.

3. **Be persistent.** Continue to check in with policymakers over time — make your organization a trusted resource for information on abortion rights and reproductive justice. You want to be top of mind when policymakers need guidance on these issues.

  You can find more details and information here.

**Directly Lobby Decisionmakers**

Direct lobbying is when an organization attempts to influence specific legislation or policies by stating its position to a legislator or other government employee who participates in the formulation or passage of policy. If your association asks its staff or organizational members to send messages to an elected official asking them to support or oppose a specific piece of legislation, that's direct lobbying. (If you ask the general public to do this, it's called grassroots lobbying). Direct lobbying also includes efforts to influence rules and regulations (how state agencies implement the law).

Here are some ways to do direct lobbying no matter how few or many resources you have at your fingertips:

- Write a letter (email or handwritten) to elected officials supporting or opposing policy. Even better: partner with other YWCAs in your region or state like North Carolina did in May 2023 when they issued a [joint statement opposing the inclusion of extremely restrictive abortion limitations](https://sixrepro.org/) in the proposed state budget.

- Provide written [testimony about reproductive rights](https://sixrepro.org/) to your state legislature about the harms (or benefits) of specific proposed legislation.

- Plan a [Reproductive Justice Lobby Day/Capitol Hill Day](https://sixrepro.org/) in your state capital. Help set up meetings with elected officials to talk about the impact of legislation on individuals in their district.

- Send lawmakers drafts of the legislation you want to see passed. Check out [this package of reproductive health bills](https://sixrepro.org/) recently signed into law by New York Governor Kathy Hochul for example. Colorado also [codified the right to abortion](https://sixrepro.org/) last year.
• Host a phone bank so that residents can call to urge their elected officials to oppose or support a piece of legislation in the leadup to a vote (here’s how).

• Hire a lobbyist who has the knowledge, relationships, and capacity to engage regularly with elected officials across the political spectrum.

Sources

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