



State Attorneys General Specialized Reproductive Rights Units

Background of Reproductive Rights Units

As the battle over abortion rights continues to unfold in state capitols and courtrooms across the country, many state attorneys general have demonstrated their commitment to protecting access to care by establishing dedicated Reproductive Rights Units within their offices.

Reproductive Rights Units prioritize protecting and expanding access to reproductive healthcare, addressing disparities in maternal health, combating misinformation and disinformation that hinder access to care, and collaborating across state borders to counter national challenges to reproductive rights.

Many of these units were established in response to the wave of legal restrictions on reproductive healthcare that arose following the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*, which eliminated the federal right to abortion. In the wake of that decision, [nearly half of the states](#) significantly limited or completely prohibited access to abortion. Some states have also moved to criminalize not just healthcare providers and patients, but other individuals who facilitate access to, or provide information about, such care.

These new restrictions [have worsened an already dire maternal health crisis](#) in states with the most restrictive reproductive health laws. For example, Alabama's overall maternal mortality rate is 64.63 deaths per 100,000 births, nearly twice the national rate of 34.09. For African American pregnant people in Alabama, that number skyrockets to 100.07. Not only is Alabama one of just ten states that have refused to expand Medicaid, thus leaving many low-income residents without access to care, but doctors who practice the full scope of obstetric medicine in the state now face [threats of criminal charges by Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall](#). This climate of fear has [chilled obstetric practice](#) and contributed to a [maternity care desert](#) in parts of the state.

Reproductive Rights Units in attorneys general offices can help to stem this tide of legal restrictions and poor healthcare outcomes.

Function of Reproductive Rights Unit

Reproductive Rights Units enable attorneys general offices to take a leading role at the state and national levels in advocating for access to the full scope of reproductive healthcare. These units also prioritize the voices of communities most harmed by restrictive policies and ensure that patients can continue to receive, and clinicians can continue to provide, reproductive health services. Additionally, these units strive to broaden the discourse on reproductive health to focus on reproductive justice, birth justice, and health disparities, particularly among marginalized communities that face higher risks of maternal mortality or complications during and after childbirth.

Examples of Attorneys General Efforts

New Jersey Attorney General Matthew Platkin [established a Reproductive Rights Strike Force](#).

This specialized task force is tasked with pursuing civil and criminal enforcement measures and developing programs to safeguard access to reproductive healthcare and abortion services for New Jersey residents and individuals traveling to New Jersey for such care. Additionally, this strike force is part of a collaborative alliance between the Office of the Attorney General and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey, marking the first state-federal partnership of its kind in the country to protect reproductive rights. As part of this partnership, in December 2022, New Jersey Attorney General Platkin [granted security funding to 28 eligible healthcare providers and facilities through the Reproductive Health Security Grant Program](#). With an allocated fund of \$5 million, this initiative aims to prevent violence and property damage in the face of heightened security threats experienced by vulnerable providers and facilities.

Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes has also [created a dedicated Reproductive Rights Unit](#) that defends reproductive rights in the state and collaborates with other states and national organizations to safeguard and broaden access to care. Attorney General Mayes has emphasized preserving privacy of reproductive health information, countering misinformation, and educating residents about their rights.

Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Campbell [established a Reproductive Justice Unit](#) to counter attacks on reproductive health, ensure gender affirming care for transgender youth, and address racial disparities in maternal care. Attorney General Campbell's Unit not only prioritizes policy and enforcement actions but also emphasizes expanding awareness about reproductive justice, birth justice, and addressing maternal health disparities that specifically impact Black and brown communities.

Grantmaking

In addition to dedicated units, many state attorneys general can issue and administer grants to promote and respond to public safety, civil rights, and consumer concerns; some have used this grantmaking authority to promote safety at health clinics and to reduce racial disparities in access to maternity care. For example, as mentioned above, New Jersey Attorney General Matthew Platkin established a clinic safety grant. And Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Campbell [awarded \\$1.5 million as part of her Maternal Health Equity Grant](#) to organizations that aim to reduce maternal mortality by increasing culturally competent support services.

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