

To: Interested Parties
From: Reproductive Freedom for All Research Team
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The Next Frontier of Anti-Abortion Attacks Is Localities

Anti-abortion extremists are more emboldened, their tactics more violent, and their policies more harmful than ever before—and they are coming to people’s doorsteps in red, blue, and purple states alike. The next frontier of attacks on reproductive freedom is the local level: cities and counties, abortion clinics and town councils, and hospitals and highways. **The anti-abortion movement is dead set on putting in motion new and more invasive local strategies for controlling pregnant people by targeting their communities. It is pushing to go beyond state bans to further undermine people’s access to abortion care and entrap the communities supporting them in an ever-expanding web of criminalization.**

Everybody is under threat from local assaults on reproductive freedom, even in states that do not currently and are not likely to ban abortion care. Anti-abortion extremists did not stop at overturning *Roe*, and will not stop now that 27.3 million women are living across 21 states that have eliminated or restricted access to abortion because of bans. This does not include people who can get pregnant but do not identify as women—if we factor in that population, the harm is even greater. Anti-abortion actors are angling to subject more and more Americans to their violence and extremism by ramping up local efforts.

Clinic Violence Outbreak

Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, threats and acts of violence targeting abortion clinics, providers, and patients have escalated across the country. [Chilling increases](#) in arsons, invasions, death threats, and stalking have gripped communities in red states and blue states. And after dozens of clinics were [forced to close](#) in states that banned abortion, clinics in [protective states](#) saw a disproportionate rise in violence and harassment.

Anti-abortion actors know that their political leverage to restrict care in the 22 states and the District of Columbia that protect the right to abortion in state law is limited, so they opt to make seeking abortion care from clinics in these hubs dangerous. The extremists are also doubling-down on subjecting “safe haven” clinics to greater brutality to disincentivize people living in states that ban abortion from traveling across state lines to access care. Just days ago, there was a [shooting](#) at an abortion clinic in Helena, Montana—a critical access point in the Mountain West. **This surge of right-wing violence should serve as a reminder that no community is exempt from anti-abortion attacks.**

Republicans are currently attempting to ratchet up local anti-abortion violence under the guise of protecting free speech and [resisting](#) political [persecution](#). This month, Congressional Republicans [introduced](#) Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America-backed legislation to repeal the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, which has provided federal protection

against the violent tactics extremists use to target abortion providers and patients and block them from entering clinics. The Becket Fund—a right-wing legal organization—recently [petitioned](#) the Supreme Court to overturn *Hill v. Colorado*, one of the last legal precedents protecting against clinic harassment. **Rather than disavow clinic bomb threats, blockades, and shootings afflicting cities nationwide, Republicans are paving the way for more and [promoting](#) the [disinformation](#) on abortion and “[fetal rights](#)” that inspired them.**

“Sanctuary City” Ordinances

Unprecedented local legislative attacks on abortion have dovetailed with right-wing violence. Anti-abortion extremists Mark Lee Dickson and Jonathan Mitchell are leading efforts to [pass municipal ordinances](#) banning abortion that have so far swept 67 cities and five counties. Post-*Dobbs*, they argue that the Comstock Act—a dormant, outdated “obscenity” law from the 1800s—[should](#) be [enforced](#) as a nationwide de facto abortion ban that trumps any state-level protections.

In this last year, Mitchell devised and launched a model municipal ban invoking Comstock for Dickson to shop around cities in blue states and target critical access points for care bordering Republican-controlled states with abortion bans. **Enforcing these ordinances would supercharge surveillance of pregnant people seeking abortion care, their communities, and their providers.** And what’s more, the ordinances were designed to provoke challenges from Democratic state officials, tee up legal battles between local and state governments, and lay the [groundwork](#) to land Comstock before the Supreme Court. Dickson has already gotten “Comstock ordinances” [passed](#) in five cities and two counties in New Mexico and Illinois.

Mitchell and Dickson are also pushing vigilante-enforced “abortion trafficking” municipal ordinances in restrictive states that make it a crime to facilitate access to abortion and transport anyone to get care out-of-state via roads within city or county limits. Two cities and two counties in Texas have [passed](#) these laws so far. This heinous tactic is intended to instill a fear of surveillance among pregnant people to isolate them from their support systems.

Even if these laws are never enforced, given their conflict with the constitutional right to travel, they will have a chilling effect on people’s ability to effectuate their reproductive decisions. Plus, these ordinances regard the fetus as the victim of trafficking—arming the anti-abortion movement with local precedent for a national [abortion ban based on “personhood”](#) imposed through the federal judiciary, outside of the national legislative process. It is clear that anti-abortion extremists are test-running hardline policies in county commissions and city councils to establish the foundation from which to scale up oppression. They have a [target list](#) for their next moves and are not slowing down.

All Abortion Politics Is Local

All too often, attacks on abortion at the national and state levels have overwhelmingly localized aftershocks. For example, [hospitals](#) are closing their maternity wards as the specter of criminalization around abortion provision from state bans prevents doctors from providing

obstetric services nationally recognized as the standard of care—exacerbating maternal care deserts and maternal mortality rates. Just this year, at least [23 hospitals shuttered their labor and delivery units](#), as abortion bans post-*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* constrain providers, [force them](#) out of restrictive states, and deter OB-GYN residencies.

While alarming, the local battleground of attacks also opens up a new frontier for mobilization and action for the reproductive freedom movement. As we have learned from efforts fighting back against state laws targeting abortion access, these fights have afforded reproductive rights and health organizations the opportunity to engage with voters in communities where the impact is felt directly and led to massive post-*Dobbs* victories in states like Michigan and Kansas.

As anti-abortion extremists now target town councils, school boards, and other local governing bodies, new opportunities for engagement and mobilization exist with an entry point for action that feels more accessible and comfortable for many. Pushing for proactive protections at the local level—as allies and activists already have in city councils and county commissions across the country—empowers supporters of reproductive freedom to positively impact access to abortion care and health outcomes in their communities.