

Abortion Rights Advocates Launch Legal Defense Network in the U.S.



The Abortion Defense Network, a collaboration between significant abortion rights organizations and private law firms, has been launched to counsel individuals navigating the complex and rapidly changing patchwork of US abortion laws. The network, which includes the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Center for Reproductive Rights, will match patients and providers with attorneys who can defend them against prosecution and civil suits in states that have banned or severely restricted abortion access.

The network was established in response to the Supreme Court's decision in June 2022 to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a landmark case that established federal abortion rights nearly 50 years ago. Since the decision, a dozen states have banned abortion almost entirely, leading to concerns among abortion rights advocates about the prosecution of patients who travel across state lines or self-manage abortions at home and providers whose medical judgment might conflict with state law.

Jennifer Dalven, Director of the Reproductive Freedom Project at the ACLU, said that the Abortion Defense Network was created to help those involved with abortion care navigate a "confusing and hostile legal landscape." The network will help cover legal expenses in criminal and civil proceedings, but it is unclear how much funding will be provided.

The launch of the Abortion Defense Network comes a day after 20 Democratic governors announced an alliance to protect abortion rights and access within their states. Abortion rights supporters have been frustrated with the limited strides the Biden administration has made to safeguard abortion access post-Roe. While President Joe Biden's administration has sought to improve access to medication abortion, an upcoming federal court decision could also jeopardize that avenue.

Patients and providers seeking counsel can do so through the network, while patients will be referred to a helpline run by one of the network's advocacy partners, If/When/How. Private firms, including Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP, Goodwin Procter LLP, Hogan Lovells US LLP, Morrison & Foerster LLP, O'Melveny & Myers LLP, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP, and Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP will provide the network's legal resources.

Overall, the Abortion Defense Network aims to provide a vital service to individuals seeking abortions and providers facing legal challenges in states with restricted abortion access. As the legal landscape shifts, the network's services will be crucial in ensuring individuals can access safe and legal abortion care.

REFERENCES:

U.S. abortion rights groups and law firms launch legal defense network