



The Importance of Federal Reproductive Health Advocacy

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The general public agrees that abortion and reproductive health should be a protected right for individuals living within the United States. However, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 and the subsequent abortion and reproductive health restrictions leaves many individuals unprotected and vulnerable. Policymakers need to take the necessary steps to protect their constituents and their reproductive freedom. Some of these steps include introducing and promoting legislation that would protect their constituents, advocating for funding to go towards reproductive health services, voting against legislation that would put their constituents' health at risk, and creating and voting for similar legislation at the local and state levels.

Current Reproductive Health Restrictions

As a result of recent abortion restrictions after the dismantling of *Roe v. Wade* and the federal protection of the right to an abortion, nearly 18 million people of reproductive age are being denied access to reproductive care. In 2023, 80 abortion restrictions went into effect and 14 states have enforced total bans with extremely limited exceptions. In addition, 157 provisions were introduced to heavily restrict access to gender-affirming care.

The lack of reproductive health advocacy puts several communities at risk. People of color, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community are at a higher risk of not receiving the reproductive care that they need to thrive. Rural communities are also disproportionately affected by health care access disparities due to the lack of resources and the need for travel to receive care. Individuals living in rural areas will be more likely to suffer from the lack of reproductive health services due to the inability to travel (and the potential safety risks of traveling) and the high costs of care.

House representatives have worked on addressing the impacts on bans and policies restricting health services by introducing HR 445, also known as the Ombuds Act, which creates a position within the Department of Health and Human Services dedicated to supporting access to reproductive and sexual health services. This bill is a small but necessary change that policymakers should be supportive of.

Limiting Access to Reproductive Health Affects Communities

Research has demonstrated that access to sexual and reproductive health services significantly benefits individuals' overall health and well-being. However, there has been a strong push to remove and/or limit these services from the public. Removing or limiting these services damages the community's overall health and is linked to higher maternal and infant mortality rates. Research suggests that making these services more accessible to the public can help lower the rates of STIs, unplanned pregnancies, and sexual assault.

Impact of the Ombuds Act

The goal of H.R.445 is to create a position that focuses support on reproductive and sexual health services that will educate the public about medical abortions and provide medically accurate information on all reproductive health services. In addition, the position will collect and analyze data about civilian access to health insurance coverage for reproductive health services. They will also coordinate with the Federal Trade Commission on any issues relating to consumer protection or data privacy regarding receiving reproductive services. This position is needed to help create awareness of available resources on a national scale and address the public health crisis that has been exacerbated since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned.

The policy is designed to target all individuals that reside within the United States, specifically women of reproductive age by ensuring that services will be more accessible to lower rates of STIs, unplanned pregnancies, and sexual assault. In addition, the accessibility of these services will improve maternal and infant survival rates.

If implemented, the Ombuds Act will help individuals obtain helpful, accurate information concerning insurance coverage, locations, and access to medical care.

Federal Level Health Advocacy

It's important for policymakers that are supportive of reproductive health access to find ways to advocate for populations who may not have the resources to advocate and protect themselves. In the current political landscape, during which powerful policymakers continue to ban and restrict access to health services, it becomes even more necessary to push for the expansion of programs around reproductive health. Access to services can save lives, lower rates of STIs, and prevent unplanned pregnancies and sexual assault.

By creating this position within the Department of Health and Human Services, the policy ensures that professionals and individuals will have their sexual and reproductive health services advocated for and protected on a national scale. This is incredibly important during a time that abortion rights are being attacked and overturned. While some states have elected to protect access to abortion and reproductive health services, plenty have not. Having an Ombuds position that focuses on reproductive health services would ensure that the correct steps are being taken to prevent the denial of essential reproductive health services in states that are targeting said services.

The **mission of the Department of Health and Human Services** is to “enhance the health and well-being of Americans” by providing health and human services that are effective and supported by research. However, they cannot fully complete their mission without providing healthy and research-based reproductive healthcare to individuals in America.