



## **Q&A: Navigating Reproductive Health and Justice in 2025**

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On February 27th, 2025 we featured [Fran Linkin](#) (Director of Research on Reproductive Rights at State Innovation Exchange) and SSN member [Carrie N. Baker](#) (Sylvia Dlugasch Bauman Chair of American Studies and Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Smith College) to offer insights into the ways reproductive rights researchers can develop fruitful connections with legislators. Dr. Baker also detailed her experiences of forging relationships with key stakeholders to impact state policy decisions on reproductive rights.

Here are some highlights from their conversation:

### **Fran Linkin on SiX**

#### **On what SiX is:**

“SiX (State Innovation Exchange) is a nonprofit knowledge and skills building resource for state legislators, working on progressive policy around the country, and we have close to 4,000 state legislators in our network who are engaging with each other and learning from one another across state lines. Within SiX, there is the reproductive rights team, [where] we manage a cohort of 673 state legislators, representing all 50 states, who are part of our Reproductive Freedom Leadership Council, or our RFLC. And these are state legislators who have agreed to our vision and values and are committed to championing reproductive health rights and justice in their states.”

#### **On the kind of feedback reproductive health and rights scholars can provide SiX:**

“SiX works as a kind of third party translator in between many of the researchers and providers and the state legislators in our network. And I want to know what is working for you. I have my takeaways from where I sit, and my perspectives, but I am very curious to hear, as these types of connections with legislators increase and build and evolve, what's working and what's not working and where we can continue to make this smoother, make this more effective.”

#### **On SiX's rapid response rooms:**

"One of the things that has become a cornerstone of our work since since the leak of the *Dobbs* decision, in spring of 2022, was rapid response rooms where we basically create a space for state legislators in the Reproductive Freedom Leadership Council to connect with each other, talk about what's coming, ask questions, figure out how national or other state litigation might be coming down the pipe for for their states, talk about state policy strategies, and even language—'oh, what did you do to make sure that your shield law was expansive enough? Oh, we did this. Here's who you should talk to.'"

### **On educating legislators to use data from experts:**

"[We create] educational spaces, where we're not lobbying on a particular bill, but we are building the knowledge of the state legislators, and their confidence in using data directly from you all, directly from the folks doing the work and holding that expertise. We also have a resource library on our website where we have video explainers from experts in the field. We have one pagers, we uplift talking points, we uplift materials and briefs that already are being made by folks in the field. [Because] as I'm sure you all are very aware, it has never been more clear that state legislatures are among the most important battlegrounds for progressive change at this point in time."

### **On the value of research for legislators:**

"Legislators want to know what is happening on the ground. And they want to know who in their states they can talk to about it. I've worked with several folks to create either state-specific or regional conversations for legislators and researchers and providers to connect about what is going on. National data is very helpful, and being able to say, I know how this applies in my state and to my constituents. This work is a long term investment. It may not be that the research we talk to people about moves policy in one session. It might be a multi-session effort. We've seen that with a lot of the maternal health policies that it's this long term investment. Ironically [this happens a lot of the time] in states that have abortion bans as well, but to get the infrastructure there for maternal health that is needed. Legislators use research and stories to fight back on restrictive, non-evidence based policy, but also to fight for proactive evidence-driven policy and to know when not to legislate. So it's not always about moving a brand new law. Sometimes it's about knowing when not to interfere, when not to silo things, when not to identify and list out every reason.

### **On Scholars Strategy Network's role in helping SiX:**

SSN really comes in, in helping us to figure out, how do we make the research accessible? It's often not that [legislators] need one particular research paper's findings. It's that they need to see where that sits in context in the literature, so they can say, 'I know I have this body of literature behind my values, and I'm going to be able to push back on misinformation, I'm going to be able to push for what I want to see.' And finally, I think we can engage legislators in a conversation about the role of data. I would imagine that, like me, many of us have been in conversations where people say that data doesn't matter. Research doesn't matter. Science doesn't matter. And instead of shying away from that, let's talk about the ways we can bring what we know to

matter into a conversation with their values, their storytelling, their insight of what's happening on the ground. How do we make it feel more accessible? And how do we build that confidence that we have in the data, and the research actually having a really important role here?"

## **Carrie N. Baker on abortion research and policy**

### **On combating misinformation as researchers:**

"I just published this book, *Abortion Pills, U.S. History and Politics*, and I did it because shortly after Dobbs in November of 2022, anti-abortion doctors filed a lawsuit in Amarillo, Texas, challenging FDA approval of Nipristone. And in the complaint, they said that Mifopristone was a dangerous drug, and it hadn't been adequately researched, and that the FDA back in the day, in the '90s, had rushed approval. And I'd been covering abortion pills for *Ms Magazine* at that point and doing my own research for about six years. But I was pretty sure it hadn't been rushed through approval. So I went out there to try to find the book on that, and it didn't exist. And so I decided, I'm going to write that book, because I think this can be really helpful to legislators, policymakers, activists, and others. Because a lot of what the anti-abortion movement does is make stuff up, make up history, make up science, make up the impact of why women are getting abortions. All these things are just made up. And so as researchers, it's really important for us to create a rock solid and accessible research base for people to counter those claims."

### **On the increase in abortions since the *Dobbs* decision:**

"There have been a lot [of abortions], despite Dobbs. About 100,000 more people in 2023 got abortions than in 2020. Despite bans in 18 states. And that might sound surprising, but I will tell you a big part of why that happened is because of researchers who made their research available to the public, policymakers and litigators and activists, to use to counter the misinformation."

### **On interacting with policymakers:**

"There was a bill that came up in 2021 to require public universities in the state of Massachusetts to provide medication abortion in their health care clinics. Only one state had done it at the time, California, and my legislator, who I knew from the community...had heard about California's law, and she reached out to me, and said, 'I would like this law done here in Massachusetts.' ...this wasn't even really my area of research. I called up the researchers out in California, and asked, 'How do you do this study?' And I used their model, which was helpful. We said, 'If you're a student at UMass Amherst, and there are no abortion pills on campus, how far do you have to go to get to the nearest abortion clinic? How long do you have to wait? What do you have to pay? What kind of burdens are there for you to be able to access that?' In Massachusetts there were 13 public university campuses, and I measured, how many miles away is the nearest abortion clinic? How long does it take to get there on public transportation? How much does it cost? So we did this assessment of burdens on students accessing care. And then we wrote and published this piece. And then my legislator asked me to

come and testify in front of the legislature, which I did. I also did a lot of media work. I spoke with journalists at the *Boston Globe*, and GBH, the local public radio. I even did some national NPR stories because it got people's attention. And the legislation passed shortly after Dobbs in July of 2022."

### **On the research needs of state legislators:**

"While obviously what's happening is terrible for reproductive rights around the country, there's an opportunity right now. Because of what's happening at the federal level, state legislators—at least in progressive states—are looking for things to do. And so assisting them to do this [is important]. And just like legislators look to other legislators for ideas, I was looking to other researchers and other states that had done studies to support legislation in those other states. So it worked really well, and the legislation passed, and, it's been implemented, and it's really expanded. It means, rather than a UMass student having to get on a bus for two and a half hours to get to Planned Parenthood in Springfield to pick up abortion pills, and then two and a half hours back, they can just get it on campus. And that's also become a resource for people in the community as well."

### **On work that can be done in banned states:**

"[There's so much opportunity] in banned states. And it may not be directly supporting a legislator to pass a bill, but it might be supporting a legislature to deep-six a bill that's harmful. Another area I've done a lot of work in, is anti-abortion centers or crisis pregnancy centers. I've done a lot of work both with state level legislators, but also local city councillors and city councils to pass resolutions to support that work. A huge problem with these crisis pregnancy centers is that they pretend to be protected when they're not. And so I'm working with [my legislator] now to pass legislation, to strengthen privacy protections—in particular digital privacy protections. A lot of states are directing enormous funds to these anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers, and they're doing it with no transparency or accountability. The anti CPC industry is a 1.7 billion industry. I work very closely with the Reproductive Health and Freedom Watch, which is doing a lot of research and surveillance around money, and the money behind this industry, where it's coming from, whether there's accountability. So I think that's an issue that can work in a lot of states and can mobilize taxpayers to say, okay, if you're getting our money, what are you doing with it? And are you actually helping people? And are you following safe procedures?"

### **On reaching out to legislators:**

"I've had a ton of fun working with legislators, and I think developing a relationship with them, letting them know that you're available to do what would be helpful to them is one way to do it. The other way, if you've already done the research, is to reach out to legislators and say, 'You might do this, or here's this research.' But just saying, 'I'm here to help produce the research you need to get done. What you need to do?' is a different approach that's really worked well for me."