

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 23, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

We write as Black women lawmakers, proud members of the Congressional Black Caucus, and on behalf of the more than 21 million Black women in America to urge you to use every tool at your disposal to protect fundamental reproductive rights and abortion access across this country—including by declaring a public health and national emergency in response to the unprecedented and dangerous attacks on abortion care.

Any day now, the extreme right-wing Supreme Court majority is poised to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, reversing nearly 50 years of settled law and legal precedent—a move that will obliterate legal abortion rights across the nation and exacerbate multiple public health crises disproportionately impacting Black communities. The effects of this decision on the lives and health of Black women and pregnant people will be devastating and require an urgent and whole-of-government response.

It is clear that dozens of states across the country are emboldened and are not waiting for a decision in the *Jackson Women’s Health* case to ban and further restrict abortion. More than 550 abortion restrictions have been introduced in over 42 states<sup>1</sup> and the stated long-term goal of anti-abortion politicians is a nationwide ban on abortion. Black women are more likely to live and seek abortion services in the South and in other states where abortion would be automatically banned after a Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe*.<sup>2</sup> These unprecedented and calculated attacks on our bodily autonomy are a direct affront to the lives and freedom of Black women.

Furthermore, there is already a maternal health crisis in the United States that is disproportionately harming Black women due to the racist and discriminatory legacies of our medical and health care systems. Black women and pregnant people already face significant systemic barriers to accessing essential and time-sensitive sexual and reproductive health care

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<sup>1</sup> Nash L et. al., “2022 State Legislative Sessions: Abortion Bans and Restrictions on Medication Abortion Dominate,” Guttmacher Institute, May 26, 2022. <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2022/03/2022-state-legislative-sessions-abortion-bans-and-restrictions-medication-abortion>

<sup>2</sup> Tamir C et. al., “Facts About the U.S. Black Population”, Pew Research Institute, March 25, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/facts-about-the-us-black-population/>

services, including abortion, maternity care, screenings for cervical cancer, mammograms and other wellness exams, HIV and STI testing, and contraception.<sup>3</sup> These systemic barriers have led to stark racial health and economic disparities that have only been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirms that the maternal mortality rate for Black women increased significantly between 2019 and 2020<sup>4</sup>, and in the first six months of the pandemic alone, Black women experienced a 2.3 year drop in life expectancy.<sup>5</sup> Research also indicates that the compounding crises of maternal health and access to abortion care may worsen, not prevent, fatal intimate partner violence. A recent study found that homicide is a leading cause of death for pregnant and post-partum people, with Black pregnant women at the greatest risk.<sup>6</sup>

In the midst of a Black maternal mortality crisis already robbing us of the lives of Black women three to four times the rate of white women<sup>7</sup>, restricting access to abortion care will disproportionately endanger the lives of Black women and pregnant people. A harrowing study estimates that banning abortion across the United States would result in an estimated 21% increase in maternal deaths across all races, and a 33% increase in maternal deaths among Black individuals.<sup>8</sup>

Forcing individuals to carry an unwanted pregnancy has been shown to put their physical and mental health at risk as well.<sup>9</sup> The comprehensive Turnaway study<sup>10</sup> has accounted for the ways in which denying abortion care can contribute to the mental health crisis. It found that patients who are denied abortions are initially more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety, lower life satisfaction, and lower self-esteem compared with those who could obtain abortions. Additionally, patients who were turned away from abortion services were more likely to stay in touch with an abusive partner. As our nation continues to combat an unprecedented mental health crisis and fights to combat domestic violence, efforts to ban abortion will only exacerbate these challenges.

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<sup>3</sup> Thompson, TM et. al., “Racism Runs Through It: Examining The Sexual And Reproductive Health Experience Of Black Women In The South”, HealthAffairs, February 2022, <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01422>.

<sup>4</sup>Tina Reed, “CDC: Maternal Mortality Disparities Have Worsened,” Axios, Feb. 23, 2022 <https://www.axios.com/2022/02/23/us-maternal-mortality-disparities-by-race>

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, NCHS, 2021 <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/VSRR10-508.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Wallace M et.al. “Homicide During Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period in the United States, 2018–2019”, Obstetrics & Gynecology, November 2021. [https://journals.lww.com/greenjournal/Abstract/2021/11000/Homicide\\_During\\_Pregnancy\\_and\\_the\\_Postpartum.10.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/greenjournal/Abstract/2021/11000/Homicide_During_Pregnancy_and_the_Postpartum.10.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> Hoyert DL, Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2020, NCHS Health E-Stats. <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:113967>

<sup>8</sup> Amanda Jean Stevenson, “The Pregnancy-Related Mortality Impact of a Total Abortion Ban in the United States: A Research Note on Increased Deaths Due to Remaining Pregnant,” Dec. 1, 2021. <https://read.dukeupress.edu/demography/article/58/6/2019/265968/The-Pregnancy-Related-Mortality-Impact-of-a-Total>

<sup>9</sup> American Journal of Public Health, “Socioeconomic Outcomes of Women Who Receive and Women Who are Denied Wanted Abortions in the United States” 2018 <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304247>

<sup>10</sup> Greene Foster, Diana. “The Turnaway Study,” Scribner, 2020.

Many states also already have extreme anti-abortion laws that would criminalize abortion care and other pregnancy outcomes, including experiencing pregnancy loss; for struggling with substance use; and for self-managing abortion care.<sup>11</sup> Black women and pregnant people are significantly more likely to be prosecuted and arrested under these laws, particularly in the South.<sup>12</sup> If *Roe* is overturned, much of the South is poised to enact outright abortion bans, rendering Black women uniquely vulnerable to investigations for pregnancy loss.

It is clear that attacks on reproductive rights and abortion access are a threat to the public health and will put Black lives most at risk. A strong majority of Black women view abortion care as essential health care (66%) and want abortion to be easily accessible in their communities (81%).<sup>13</sup> Every day we wait to respond is a day wasted in mitigating the public health crisis that *Roe*'s dismantling will catalyze.

We urge you to use any and all executive authorities to address the public health crisis our nation will face if *Roe v. Wade* is dismantled. Declaring a public health emergency and national emergency will allow your Administration to utilize additional flexibilities and deploy resources where necessary. In this unprecedented moment, we must act urgently as if lives depend on it because they do.

We appreciate your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,



Ayanna Pressley

Member of Congress



Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



Cori Bush  
Member of Congress



Alma Adams Ph.D  
Member of Congress

<sup>11</sup> Dennie M. and Fielding J, "Miscarriage of Justice: The Danger of Laws Criminalizing Pregnancy Outcomes," Brennan Center for Justice, November 9, 2021. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/miscarriage-justice-danger-laws-criminalizing-pregnancy-outcomes>

<sup>12</sup> Paltrow LM and Flavin J, "Arrests of and Forced Interventions on Pregnant Women in the United States, 1973–2005: Implications for Women's Legal Status and Public Health," *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*, Duke University Press, April 1, 2013. <https://read.dukeupress.edu/jhpl/article/38/2/299/13533/Arrests-of-and-Forced-Interventions-on-Pregnant>

<sup>13</sup> Perry Udem Research Communication. "Results from a National Survey of Black Adults: The Lives and Voices of Black Women on the Intersections of Politics, Race and Public Policy," *In Our Own Voice: Black Women's Reproductive Agenda*, June 8, 2018. <https://blackrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/The-Life-And-Voices-Of-Black-Women.pdf>

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