

Roe v. Wade has never been enough to ensure abortion access |

GUEST COMMENTARY

By Ann Marie Brokmeier and Carolyn Williams
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FILE - Stephen Parlato of Boulder, Colo., holds a sign that reads "Hands Off Roe!!!" as abortion rights advocates and anti-abortion protesters demonstrate in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, on Dec. 1, 2021, in Washington. With Roe v. Wade facing its strongest threat in decades, a new poll finds Democrats increasingly view protecting abortion rights as a high priority for the government.(AP Photo/Andrew Harnik, File) (Andrew Harnik/AP)

Last month, the Supreme Court declined to block Texas' restrictive 6-week abortion ban. And later this year, the same nine justices will decide whether to overturn Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortion in the U.S. exactly 49 years ago as of Jan. 22.

While the legal right to an abortion is vital, the truth is Roe has never been enough. We at the Baltimore Abortion Fund (BAF) continue to witness how systemic racism creates unnecessary obstacles to care, especially for people of color and those working to make ends meet. Financial, logistical and social barriers have always prevented marginalized people from actually getting

abortion care. This is evident in Texas, in Mississippi and even in states like Maryland — where the right to an abortion is currently protected by state law.

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That's why BAF exists. For nearly eight years, our confidential helpline has connected thousands of people to the funding they need to access abortion health care in Maryland. Some of the people we serve are traveling from states with restrictive and illegal bans. Others are traveling to Maryland for third-trimester surgical abortions, a form of care that is only available at four clinics nationwide. But 54% of the people we serve are Maryland residents who still face significant barriers to access, despite our state's legal protections.

Abortions are expensive, especially for people who aren't fully covered by private or public medical insurance. Over 60% of people who call our helpline are in their second trimester, with an average procedure cost of \$3,500. But nearly 10% of our callers in the past year faced out-of-pocket costs between \$10,000 and \$30,000. And this is before factoring in the cost of travel, accommodations, child care, and taking time off work with no pay.

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Many of those calling our helpline have to do their own fundraising — calling multiple abortion funds, telling their personal stories over and over again — in order to fully cover the cost of their health care. When callers aren't able to fully pay for their abortion, many are forced to reschedule. This makes their procedures exponentially more expensive and less accessible.

No one should ever have to choose between paying rent and accessing health care. As we continue our work in the face of escalating national and state attacks on abortion access, we must build a future that meets the needs of the communities we serve. This is why we — alongside partner abortion funds in our national network — are demanding a better path forward.

Our network of abortion funds is coming together to state our demands for a future with unfettered access to abortion care. We demand that abortion care be accessible, compassionate, affirming for all identities, safe for everyone who needs it, and free from both politically motivated barriers and cost barriers. We envision a world where there are no obstacles — financial, geographic or social — to obtaining the care people need.

Investing in the work of abortion funds is a vital part of that vision. Abortion funds have spent years creating pathways for abortion access and affirming our callers' rights to reproductive autonomy. We show up every day for those who need us most, knowing that as institutions continue to fail us, we are more than prepared to continue. But we need the resources and support to do so.

Donations from individuals who care about abortion access have always been critical to our work. But to achieve this visionary future, we also need organized philanthropy — specifically private foundations and public grant makers — to commit long-term to supporting resources for abortion funds.

We are living in critical times that demand urgent, visionary action to protect and restore reproductive rights nationwide. Abortion funds are ready to work alongside people who have had abortions, clinics, and abortion funders to collectively build a future that honors the needs of all people in our quest for reproductive justice.

Carolyn Williams and Ann Marie Brokmeier are case managers at the Baltimore Abortion Fund (BAF). Also contributing to this piece from BAF are Brigitte Winter and Lynn McCann. If you are a Maryland resident or traveling to the state for an abortion and need support, please call BAF's confidential helpline at (443) 297-9893 or visit baltimoreabortionfund.org.

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