

"When the right to abortion is endangered, the fundamental equality of women is threatened. A woman can never be equal if she is denied the basic right to make decisions for herself and her family." — NARAL Pro-Choice America

Voice for Choice

Newsletter of the Kentucky Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

Winter 2022

ACLU Of Kentucky Calls On Kentucky State Fair Board To Reinstate Abortion Billboard

ACLU Press Release October 19, 2021

LOUISVILLE, KY – The ACLU of Kentucky today sent a letter to David Beck, president and CEO of the Kentucky State Fair Board, regarding the removal of a billboard message in support of abortion rights paid for the Kentucky Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (KRCRC). KRCRC is a group of people of faith—clergy, faith leaders, congregants, and people of conscience—who believe a person's right to make their own reproductive choices is sacred and fundamental to religious freedom.

In April 2021, the billboard message was removed because the billboard owner, Kentucky State Fair Board (KSFB), reportedly found the content "objectionable." However, because KSFB is a state agency, any action restricting speech on that billboard display is subject to and governed by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. KSFB is seemingly violating the First Amendment, both in enforcing an unconstitutional and vague policy regarding removal of certain billboards and in removing KRCRC's billboard. The First Amendment significantly limits the government's ability to restrict speech in certain forums like this, absent some compelling or reasonable justifications for its restriction on speech. "A state agency cannot suppress speech based on personal feelings about an issue," said Corey Shapiro, legal director for the ACLU of Kentucky. "The billboard should be reinstated and allowed to run for the originally agreed-upon time frame in the high-profile location KRCRC originally chose."

Wayne's Words

by Wayne A. Gnatuk

The Reverend Wayne A. Gnatuk is Chair of the KRCRC Board of Directors.

We've got good news and bad news! The good news is that KRCRC has received a bequest that will enable us to hire a full-time staff person. This outreach worker will be tasked with starting KRCRC chapters throughout Kentucky at the rate of two or three a year, and with bringing faith community groups and leaders into the reproductive justice tent. Both those endeavors will make us stronger in

our legislative advocacy work and in our mission: to proclaim that yes, indeed, people of deep faith can support reproductive freedom.



Sunday January 23, 2022

4 to 5:30 pm by Zoom

RSVP Required

Forty-eight years after the *Roe v. Wade* decision, and with SCOTUS looking very likely to either gut or overturn *Roe v. Wade* by next summer, **Kentucky is facing a near future with NO abortion clinics and NO legal abortion.**

Join us to talk about what that will look like, and what we can do -- both in terms of getting those needing abortion to another state or enabling/empowering them to access "Plan C," medication abortion.

Let's vent, brainstorm and deal with this coming change together.

Besides sharing our own thoughts, we'll hear briefly from A Fund and KHJN (KY's two abortion funds) and also from someone from PlanCPills.org.

RSVP to info@krcc.org for your Zoom invitation.

In Memoriam: Jennifer Allen McComas, 1948-2020

by Ann T. Allen

Ann T. Allen is a KRCRC board member and the editor of Voice for Choice.

Jennifer McComas was a lively and warm-hearted woman with an irrepressible sense of humor, recalls her friend Don Evans. Her chief passion was animal rights and welfare, and she loved cats. She also cared a lot about KRCRC and the causes that we fight for. That's why she left KRCRC a generous bequest.

McComas was born in 1948 in Burksville, Kentucky, and came to Louisville to attend the University of Louisville as an undergraduate and as a graduate student in social work. She served Family Services (now Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services) as a social worker and later worked for the Louisville Gas and Electric Company. She served on the Board of Directors of KRCRC sometime in the 1990s.

McComas remembered several organizations in her will, of which Evans is the executor. In addition to KRCRC, her beneficiaries included Planned Parenthood of Indiana and Kentucky and Alley Cat Advocates, a group that befriends homeless cats.

For KRCRC, McComas' bequest opens up new possibilities. Thanks to her, the group will be able to modernize its communications and to expand its educational and advocacy work throughout Kentucky. We will start by hiring our first full-time employee! We thank Jennifer McComas and cherish her memory.



Jennifer Allen McComas

Wayne's Words *Cont. from page 1.*

The bad news is that there will be a constitutional amendment on the ballot next November which will put reproductive rights in Kentucky at extreme risk. At the national level, the Supreme Court's future decisions on abortion are at best extremely dicey, and on top of all that, we here in Kentucky have a state legislature that will once again be hell-bent on an anti-woman and anti-abortion agenda.

It's clear that there continues to be a great need for KRCRC to raise the reproductive freedom flag and to wave it proudly for all to see! Our board of directors is awesomely committed to doing so, but we do need your support.

The aforementioned bequest will support a full-time staff person for only a limited time. We have a chance here to take a giant step forward, but without financial support from you, we won't be able to keep it going. Please remember us in your charitable giving, and consider mentioning us in your will!

I began this column by mentioning "good news and bad news." You may have heard of the pastor who addressed her congregation one Sunday morning by saying, "I've got good news and bad news. The good news is that we have enough money to do everything in our mission statement! The bad news is that all that money is still in your pockets!"



Gnatuk speaks at the October 2 rally

KRCRC needs you! We're looking for people to serve on our state and local boards. We're looking for people to volunteer in a variety of ways. We're looking for people to share their financial resources to further KRCRC's work. In whatever ways you can help, we'll be delighted to say, "Thank you!"

Lawmakers Introduce Anti-Choice Omnibus Bill

by Angela Cooper

Angela Cooper is the communications director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky.

The 2022 legislative session is upon us, and it includes predictable attacks on reproductive freedom. Last session, the legislature passed House Bill 91, a proposed amendment to Kentucky’s Constitution that would entirely deny the right to abortion care – even in cases of rape, incest, or life-threatening conditions – if *Roe v. Wade* is ever weakened or overturned.

Not to be outdone by the 2021 General Assembly, lawmakers have introduced an anti-choice omnibus bill that would deploy several restrictions to push abortion care entirely out of reach. While the bill’s sponsor refused to publicly share draft legislation, we have seen an overview and are deeply concerned about its potential impact if it becomes law.

First, the bill claims to improve health outcomes for pregnant people, but in fact it would do the opposite. The

first portion of the bill would create even more hurdles to judicial bypass despite robust limits already in place. (Judicial bypass is the process by which a minor can seek abortion care with approval from a judge in lieu of parental approval.) The bill’s sponsor claims this would protect children who have survived trafficking, rape, or incest, by saving them from the “trauma of abortion,” but this provision would force more children to remain pregnant against their will.

Second, this bill would require people to have their embryonic or fetal tissue either buried or cremated. This is clearly intended to shame a person who has



Cont. on page 6.

KRCRC Stands for Reproductive Justice

KRCRC joined other groups on October 2 to protest the proposed anti-abortion amendment to the State Constitution. The Women’s March brought about 400 pro-choice Kentuckians to the steps of Metro Hall. KRCRC’s Chair, the Reverend Wayne A. Gnatuk, was among the speakers, and many Board members joined the crowd.



KRCRC Board members at October 2 rally (from left) Elwood Sturtevant, Ann T. Allen, Wayne A. Gnatuk, Stephanie Compton, Diane Snowa.

KRCRC Outreach Team

by Diane Snowa

The Reverend Diane Snowa is a retired minister of the United Church of Christ and a KRCRC Board member.

The Fall months were active ones for KRCRC Board members and volunteers. On September 11th, we staffed a booth at FLEA OFF MARKET, 1000 E. Market St., Louisville. In addition to three Board members, our volunteers were busy! The Wheel was the big attraction.

The PRIDE Festival on the Big Four Lawn on October 8-9 again attracted a crowd. Carol Savkovich and Diane Snowa set up the booth; Wayne A. Gnatuk was responsible for takedown; and the intervening hours kept Maria, Bernie, Charlene, Chris, and Heather on their toes. On Saturday, trying to make its mark on the PRIDE event, there was a group of five vociferous opponents reading Scripture and shouting their opposition. As at the FLEA event, KRCRC gained many names to be added to our e-mail and volunteer rosters.



Pride Booth: Joan K., left; Kethryn S., right

On October 2nd, National Women’s March day, Board Members Stephanie Compton and Diane Snowa traveled to Glasgow, Kentucky, where Snowa delivered a requested presentation. A gathering of 50 supporters listened attentively and responded enthusiastically.

Planned Parenthood Protects Abortion Access in Kentucky

by Heather Bruner

Heather Bruner is the Donor Engagement Officer at Planned Parenthood of Indiana and Kentucky.

In March 2021, the Kentucky General Assembly passed an amendment to the state constitution with the explicit goal of making it easier to ban all abortion in the state if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned. The proposed constitutional amendment stipulates: “To protect human life, nothing in this Constitution shall be construed to secure or protect a right to abortion or require the funding of abortion.” The bill will be placed on the 2022 November ballot for popular vote.

Kentucky is already home to some of the most restrictive abortion access laws in the US. We currently have only two clinics that provide abortions due to these ever-increasing restrictions. In the past five years, the General Assembly has passed eleven abortion restrictions, and more are coming.

This is a fight we can win

Polling from 2019 shows that 65% of Kentuckians, even those who identify as pro-life, support access to abortion.

The constitutional amendment is dangerous. There are no exceptions for rape, incest, or to protect the life of the mother. We know Kentuckians do not support these extreme abortion bans.

By supporting our efforts to defeat the constitutional amendment, you’re making an investment in protecting abortion rights across the country. This anti-choice amendment is a strategic move by the right to increase its power in the Commonwealth. If successful, this conservative strategy will likely be replicated across the south. But if we win this fight, we will chip away at the narrative that fights over reproductive rights in such red states as Kentucky are unwinnable.

Abortion Access is an Equity Issue

One in three women of reproductive age already lives in a state that is hostile or extremely hostile to abortion

Cont. on page 5.

Medical Students for Choice Fill Gaps in the Curriculum

by Ann T. Allen and Miranda Mason

Miranda Mason is a third-year student at the University of Louisville School of Medicine.

Miranda Mason, though herself still a student, is already an educator. The Owen County native attends the University of Louisville School of Medicine (ULSOM) and is planning a career in pediatrics. Reproductive health is also among her interests. Mason is a past president of Medical Students for Choice (MSFC), an international organization founded in the 1990s that now has more than 220 chapters in the United States and around the world.

At the University of Louisville, as in many other medical schools, MSFC works to supplement the curriculum in fields related to reproductive health. The organization provides opportunities to learn about reproductive health and justice, family planning, IUD counseling and insertion, and medical and surgical methods of abortion. By providing support and education, MSFC helps to make students feel safe to learn about these topics and pursue opportunities related to reproductive health.

MSFC opposes unnecessary regulations that target abortion providers. For example, Kentucky requires all providers to perform ultrasound examinations on abortion patients and to give them scientifically invalid information, especially about the possibility of “reversing” the effects of medical abortions. Along with other advocates, members of MSFC meet with legislators and send letters supporting access to abortion without burdensome barriers or misinformation.



Conferences, guest lectures, and financial aid for training are other resources that the group provides. Partly in response to students’ demands, ULSOM currently offers elective training at the Louisville’s EMW Women’s Surgical Center to fourth-year students. For those seeking earlier or more extensive training, MSFC offers a variety of options, including internships with abortion providers across the country.

MSFC chapters adapt to their environments and situational needs. Even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying limitations on public gatherings, the ULSOM chapter of MSFC has hosted virtual events, on one occasion training students to work on model cervixes and frequently inviting experts in reproductive health and justice to speak. MSFC now offers to provide emergency contraception on the Belknap and Health Sciences Campuses at the University of Louisville. The group has also advocated for clinic safety zones, free distribution of emergency contraception, sex education, and access to self-managed abortion.

In short, MSFC is training a new generation of physicians who will provide and advocate a full range of reproductive health care. In these young activists lies our hope for the future.

ACCESS *Cont. from page 4.*

access. That’s 25 million people. The impact of abortion restrictions is disproportionately felt by those who already experience barriers to health care, including young women, people of color, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, those with low incomes, and those who live in rural areas or have undocumented immigration status.

According to the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, “decreasing women’s access to abortion will likely increase negative health outcomes and complications, including maternal and infant mortality.” Kentucky has a higher rate of maternal mortality than the national average – an issue that has been completely ignored by the politicians trying to force the constitutional amendment on the state.

A Diverse Coalition

Over the past several years, Planned Parenthood’s organizing efforts in Kentucky have been gaining momentum. Since 2015, the database of supporters in Kentucky has grown from 3,000 to 95,000. Coinciding with that, Alliance Advocates has invested in staff. Our state director now has three full-time organizers working out of Louisville, Lexington, and western Kentucky

In this commonwealth, historical divisions are the result of racial injustice, the rural/urban divide, and wealth inequity. For this project to succeed, it must be directed by people of color and rural activists, the groups most disadvantaged by capitalist concentrations of wealth and power.

Immediately after the constitutional amendment was passed, Planned Parenthood rallied with our partners across the state to form Protect Kentucky Access

(PKA). The PKA mission is very clear: to bring together organizations interested in building grassroots power and winning the campaign to stop the 2022 constitutional amendment on abortion. To date, over thirty organizations, including KRCRC, have signed on to be members of this coalition.

To reinforce our commitment to historically silenced communities, the PKA leadership committee includes representatives of Kentucky Health Justice Network, Black Birth Coalition, SisterSong, and Sexy Sex Ed of Eastern Kentucky. KRCRC Chair Wayne A. Gnatuk and board member Stephanie Compton serve on this committee. This diverse coalition will not only defeat this ballot initiative but also strengthen the networks of progressive Kentuckians that truly represent the values of our community.

Gifts can be made with either a 501c3 or 501c4 tax designation

501c3 designated gifts can be made to: PPGNHAIK — FUNDRAISING/MS 313641, PO Box 3641, Seattle, WA 98124-3641

Political 501c4 designated gifts can be made to: Protect Kentucky Access, c/o Tamarra Wieder, 842 S. 7th St., Louisville, KY 40203.



Stephanie Compton and Wayne A. Gnatuk serve on the leadership committee of Protect Kentucky Access.



Do you shop at Kroger, with a Kroger Plus card? You can be giving KRCRC a financial boost, at no cost to you!

Two simple steps:

1. Go to www.kroger.com/communityrewards. Create an account or sign in.
2. Follow the instructions to select an organization. KRCRC is #SU106.

Now you’re ready to help KRCRC every time you shop! Just use your Kroger card (including at the gas pump), and KRCRC will receive a small percent of your purchases. Thank you!

Our Health, Our Flourishing: Individual and Community Values in Reproductive Health Care

by Annica Gage

Annica Gage is a Resident Chaplain at University of Louisville Hospital and a Candidate for ordination within the Presbyterian Church (USA).

November, 2021 marks thirty-one months that citizens in Kentucky have attempted to live as safely as possible with COVID-19, an airborne virus with an unnervingly wide range of manifestations, from short-term flu-like symptoms to long-term or even terminal lung damage. Because of the viral nature of COVID, Kentuckians have been urged from the beginning to tackle it communally, thinking of precautions as methods not only to avoid catching the disease, but also to avoid transmitting it to neighbors, co-workers, and loved ones.

Both the politicization of the virus and the deeply ingrained American tendency to think and act as an individual rather than as a neighbor in a larger community has made that easier said than done. A large faction of Americans, insisting that their exposure risk is theirs alone to negotiate, still spreads the virus. Individual and public health, however, are inextricably linked. An individual's embrace or rejection of

protection methods against COVID affects not only their own health and safety, but also the rest of their family, community, and nation.



Annica Gage

November, 2021 also marks three months since the Texas state Senate passed SB 8, a bill that prevents pregnant people in Texas from obtaining abortions after the sixth week of gestation—long before many women even know they're pregnant. The political precedent set by Texas poses a threat to citizens in other states, where legislatures may follow suit. SB 8 is currently valid in only one state, but its ramifications and the nation-wide response it has generated has shown that an individual state's policies can affect not only its own population, but also countless families beyond its boundaries

"My body, my choice" has long been a popular slogan within
Cont. on page 7.



Anti-Choice *Cont. from page 3.*

already made the private decision to seek abortion care. People can already make the decision to bury or cremate, if they so choose. This provision could also create barriers to care for patients experiencing miscarriages or other negative pregnancy outcomes. Requiring this already optional measure would force physicians and clinics to expend resources and time, regardless of the patient's wishes, reducing the time and resources dedicated to patient care.

Third, this bill would threaten funding for health care providers, social workers, shelters, and more. The "gag rule" would prohibit any organization or agency that receives any public dollars from referring people for abortion care, or even explaining that abortion care is an option. This would put politicians between patients and their health-care providers and force many essential agencies and workers to choose between their funding and what is best for the people in their care. Kentuckians should be able to receive comprehensive care and information before making life-altering decisions.

Fourth, this bill fundamentally misunderstands medication-assisted abortion care. The bill's sponsors make inaccurate claims about FDA approval of these medications and claim people are receiving abortion pills in the mail, something that is not happening anywhere in Kentucky.

The bill's sponsors also rely on a racist narrative that became prominent at the start of the pandemic by claiming the FDA is purchasing black market pills "manufactured in China."

In addition to threatening Kentuckians' health, this bill would also waste tax dollars by opening the door to costly litigation. When lawmakers pass unconstitutional laws, they are on the hook for the legal fees of both sides when they lose in court. Our communities are already vulnerable and facing extraordinary challenges. Knowingly instituting unconstitutional laws flagrantly ignores the real needs of Kentuckians for cheap political points.

We are continuing to review legislation for the 2022 session. We will keep our members and supporters informed of further attacks on reproductive freedom, progress we are able to make in the current political climate, and how they can get involved.

To join the fight for reproductive freedom in Kentucky, follow @ACLUofKY on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, sign up for email action alerts at [ACLU-KY.org](https://www.aclu-ky.org), and become a member for just \$5 at [ACLU-KY.org/Join](https://www.aclu-ky.org/Join) or make a tax-deductible donation at [ACLU-KY.org/Give](https://www.aclu-ky.org/Give).

Blowing It All Wide Open: Panel Imagines Kentucky after *Roe v. Wade*

by Ann T. Allen

The Texas abortion law “blows everything wide open,” declared Laura Landenwich, a lawyer who specializes in reproductive rights, to a meeting of the Women’s Political Council on October 25 at the University Club. Before Texas S.B. 8 was passed in May of 2021, it would have been almost inconceivable that legal abortion could become unavailable in vast areas of the country. But in addition to restricting legal abortion to the first six weeks of pregnancy (before many women know they are pregnant), the Texas law adds a uniquely cruel provision by deputizing citizens to sue anyone involved in an “illegal” abortion and promising these vigilantes a bounty of \$10,000. Now we face the possibility that state legislatures will enact similar measures throughout the entire southeast region of which Kentucky is part.

This sad dilemma calls for new thinking and action. In addition to Landenwich, the speakers included Carol Savkovich, vice-chair of KRCRC, Kate Cunningham, president of A Fund, Inc., and Jamie Abrams, a faculty member at the Brandeis School of Law. They asked how we will deal with such a situation, should it occur in Kentucky.

A Fund, which helps to fund abortions for women in financial need, has hitherto worked chiefly in Kentucky, but also sometimes provides partial funding to patients who need to travel to clinics in other states. Cunningham predicted that the number of patients who visit these out-of-state clinics may increase if abortion is further restricted in Kentucky. Many may go to Illinois, the nearest state that we can rely on to preserve reproductive choice.

KRCRC engages in education, advocacy, and organizing. If legal abortion becomes inaccessible in the state, Savkovich said that KRCRC will expand its educational mission by informing Kentuckians about 1) how to obtain financial

assistance for abortion, 2) the existence of medication abortion and websites for learning about it, and 3) helping them connect with groups assisting with travel to neighboring states for an abortion. KRCRC will also continue its advocacy work, particularly by engaging religious congregations in support of reproductive rights.

There will also be new ways of seeking and providing medical care. During the COVID pandemic, medical providers expanded telemedicine services and sometimes followed up a consultation by sending medication abortion pills by mail. Though such services will probably be illegal in Kentucky, they may be available in nearby states.

Above all, the speakers emphasized, we must build a movement. Abortion is often considered an embarrassing subject that people would rather not discuss. People who seek or have had abortions are harassed and intimidated. But unless we break our silence, the opposition—which does not hesitate to speak through legislatures, courts, religious organizations, and demonstrations—will control the discourse. Now is the time to speak, act, protest, and organize.



(from left) Virginia Woodward, Carol Savkovich, Jamie Abrams, Kate Cunningham, Laura Landenwich

Our Health *Cont. from page 6.*

the movement for reproductive justice. And while that slogan does neatly summarize the fact that reproductive health needs vary from person to person and family to family, it also reflects our tendency to reduce problems of health and health-care access to individual challenges. The deeper truth is that individual and public health are deeply intertwined—and the damage done can become catastrophic when even a relatively small portion of a community rejects one or both.

COVID-19 and SB 8 have made this truth particularly visible, but it is not a brand-new revelation. Just as we’ve long known that airborne viruses are highly contagious through shared touch and air, we’ve long known that access to abortion correlates to increases in educational attainments,

workplace participation, and familial wealth. These effects ripple out well beyond the individual. They also affect the stability and prosperity of the families, workplaces, and communities created by citizens who are empowered to grow families on their own time.

We know, in other words, that the freedom to make reproductive choices benefits not only the individual who exercises it but society as a whole. “My body, my choice” is a crucial starting point, but it’s not the end-all, be-all of public health access. If embraced in good faith and bold grace, it also lays the foundation for “our health, our flourishing.”

Source: Anna Bernstein and Kelly Jones, “The Economic Effects of Abortion Access: A Review of the Evidence,” by the Center for the Economics of Reproductive Health, 18 July 2019. Accessed 14 Nov 2021. <https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/reproductive-health/the-economic-effects-of-abortion-access-a-review-of-the-evidence/>.



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The Religious Community in Support of an Individual's Right to Choose!



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**Voice for Choice is a
publication of the
Kentucky Religious
Coalition for
Reproductive Choice.**

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The Supreme Court of the United States heard oral arguments in the case of Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization December 1, 2021, and we expect a decision in spring of 2022. This decision could overturn or weaken Roe v. Wade.