



REPRODUCTIVE CARE REFERENCE IN POST-ROE FLORIDA

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Florida's college students and library users will need help accessing information about reproductive care in the state's ever-changing and politically charged post-Roe landscape.

Unplanned pregnancy is a common reason, if not the primary reason, that college students drop out or otherwise fail to graduate. Women aged 18-24 have the highest rates of unintended pregnancy. This is also the traditional college age. Prior to the summer of 2022, Florida had been something of a haven for abortion care in the southeastern U.S. as a state with relatively few legal restrictions and fifty-five clinics. Floridians and Florida's courts are processing both the June 24, 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson's Women's Health Organization decision, which overturns the 1973 Roe v. Wade basis for abortion rights, and Florida's HB 5 law, effective July 1, 2022, which prohibits abortions after a gestational age of fifteen weeks. Pregnant Floridians need current and trustworthy information they can use to make their healthcare decisions quickly. Students have long chosen abortion as a topic for their research papers and argumentative essays, but the question of "should abortion be legal?" is no longer a theoretical academic exercise for our library users. Access to safe abortion has become a matter of existential concern to many of Florida's college students and public library users.

A Reproductive Care Information Crisis

Several factors contribute to a looming information crisis that librarians and libraries are best positioned to assist with. First, newly pregnant people are often young and in a state of panic. They may not have an understanding parent or a support network they can turn to for information.

Florida does not mandate any sexual education in its public schools, and schools that do provide sexual education must, by law, promote abstinence first and foremost. These educational policies, the general stigma surrounding abortion, opposition to

contraception and abortion by influential churches and religious figures, and an outdated medical understanding of abortion dating pre-Roe, have left many Floridians unaware of the current medical and legal realities of reproductive care. As public-serving librarians, we need to be sure we have the latest information and are ready to link our students and patrons with quality resources.

Criminalization of Reproductive Care

Now that abortion is illegal in Florida after fifteen weeks of gestation, Floridians who find a way to access care, and even those who miscarry, beyond fifteen weeks could face criminal prosecution. Texas, Oklahoma, and Idaho have already passed laws to incentivize ordinary citizens to report people suspected of having, performing, or "aiding and abetting" abortions to the authorities in exchange for a bounty. Soon, search and browser histories, e-mails, texts, social media accounts, period and fertility apps, and targeted ads may be used as evidence against pregnant Floridians and their allies in the oncoming criminalization of reproductive care.

When searching for information about abortion online, "crisis pregnancy centers" often show up at the top of the search results. These centers are not actual clinics. They masquerade as women's clinics, but do not provide contraception or abortions, are not licensed, and generally are not staffed by medical professionals. Crisis pregnancy centers are religious organizations that pressure pregnant people into considering alternatives to abortion, typically delaying patients so that they run out of time to access actual medical care. As if the constantly changing and state-by-state legal status of abortion was not difficult enough to contend with, people searching for answers online must also avoid misleading information from anti-choice groups, especially about the safety of abortion and its psychological aftermath.

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Current Florida Law

As of this writing, abortion is legal in Florida up to fifteen weeks of gestation. Special exemptions are possible beyond fifteen weeks if “two physicians certify in writing that, in reasonable medical judgment, the termination of the pregnancy is necessary to save the pregnant woman’s life or avert a serious risk of substantial and irreversible physical impairment of a major bodily function of the pregnant woman other than a psychological condition” (one physician is sufficient if a second is not available) and “the fetus has not achieved viability.” It is not illegal for a pregnant Floridian to travel out of the state to receive abortion care, but access to abortion is expected to continue to be restricted as new laws take effect in neighboring states, making it even more complicated for an information seeker to make informed decisions and timely arrangements.

Medication abortions are a crucial medical advancement, especially for people living in states with abortion bans and restrictions. Medication abortions, also called abortion with pills, are legal in Florida but with restrictions. Currently, more than 54 percent of abortions nationwide are completed with pills. This is a safe and common abortion method using two FDA-approved medications: mifepristone and misoprostol. The medications cause cramping and bleeding as the uterus is emptied, much like a spontaneous miscarriage. Follow-up care is not medically necessary unless there are complications or the signs of pregnancy do not discontinue after two weeks. Abortion with pills is not recommended for pregnancies beyond eleven weeks as their effectiveness decreases and the chance of complications increases in more advanced stages of pregnancy. Florida does not allow telehealth abortion appointments. Floridians seeking an abortion with pills can obtain a prescription or the pills themselves from an abortion provider in Florida in person. Telehealth and online pharmacies based in other jurisdictions can mail abortion pills to patients in Florida and other states with bans, but this comes with potential legal risk for the patient.

How Librarians and Libraries Can Help

Librarians are experts in evaluating information, vetting sources, and linking users with services. This combined with our dedication to patron privacy and confidentiality makes us the first line for trusted reproductive care information. College students and public library users can access information on library computers and can rest assured that librarians will not relinquish their searches, access, or checkout

history to the authorities. As with all other medical and legal reference questions, librarians must take care not to give medical or legal advice, but instead to guide library users to trusted sources, assist in evaluating information, and provide an infrastructure (policies, technology, and guidance) to enable library users to keep their information searches confidential. To best assist library users, we need a general understanding of the reproductive care options medically available and Florida’s legal restrictions, which are changing daily currently. Libraries can and should ensure our print and online collections relating to pregnancy, contraception, and abortion are up to date and helpful.

Protecting library users’ rights to free inquiry, privacy, and confidentiality are core professional values of librarianship. The USA PATRIOT Act, enacted in the wake of 9/11, prompted outrage and action from librarians nationwide. In response, the American Library Association passed a resolution stating it “opposes any use of governmental power to suppress the free and open exchange of knowledge and information or to intimidate exercising free inquiry.” American librarians resisted this infringement on their users’ rights by updating policies and procedures to retain as little patron information as possible, posting signs informing their patrons of the gag order that prohibited libraries from letting individual users know a federal agent has asked for their library records, shredding documents regularly, and lobbying and petitioning their legislators. The Dobbs decision is another excellent impetus for recommitting to these values and examining our user privacy and confidentiality policies, practices, and technologies. Using the Internet to search for information is arguably more dangerous today due to our increased reliance on Google and smartphones, which can track everything including location, and the potential use of dragnet keyword warrants that impel search engine companies to turn over a list of users who have searched for specific, criminalized keywords to the authorities. Libraries offering programming, signage, LibGuides, and handouts on online privacy and safety could consider adding new guidance with the criminalization of reproductive care in mind. Digital security and abortion rights groups are advising activists and patients to use a VPN, among other measures. Providing information seekers with a guest pass to use a library computer without ties to their library account is a precaution we can offer.

America’s division and lack of trust in our government and its institutions continue to increase. However, libraries are an exception as “78 percent of

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Americans trust libraries or librarians as sources of news and information.” Just as a patron can come to their local library for help putting together a résumé or to find out how to contact the community women’s shelter, librarians need to be ready to assist with this sensitive information need. As librarians “we distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources” as stated in the ALA Code of Ethics. Librarians can link their patrons with a real clinic, an established abortion fund (abortion funds are typically volunteer-led, mutual aid organizations that have been helping patients pay for procedures and with practical considerations like travel and childcare for years), or, at the very least, a reliable website where they can begin their search anonymously.

Resources for Librarians

Clinic and Abortion Pill Finders

Abortion Finder <https://abortionfinder.org>
 ineedana.com <https://ineedana.com>
 Plan C Pills <https://plancpills.org>

Abortion Funds

National Network of Abortion Funds
<https://abortionfunds.org>
 Florida Access Network <https://flaaccessnetwork.org>.
 Tampa Bay Abortion Fund <https://tbafund.com>

Legal Resources

Repro Legal Helpline
 844-868-2812;
<https://www.reprolegalhelpline.org/sma-contact-the-helpline/>
 National Advocates for Pregnant Women
<https://www.nationaladvocatesforpregnantwomen.org/issues/abortion/>

Privacy and Confidentiality

Electronic Frontier Foundation
<https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2022/06/security-and-privacy-tips-people-seeking-abortion>
 Digital Defense Fund
<https://digitaldefensefund.org/ddf-guides/abortion-privacy>

Other Great Resources

The M+A Hotline Call or text: 833-246-2632
 r/abortion on Reddit is staffed by [OARS](#) volunteers
<https://reddit.com/r/abortion>
 Safe2Choose www.safe2choose.org

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