

POPULATION INSTITUTE'S ANNUAL REPORT CARD SHOWS



Access to Reproductive Health and Rights at a Tipping Point: U.S. Gets an “F”

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Population Institute released its ninth annual *50 State Report Card on Reproductive Health and Rights* today. It shows that there is still a large division between states that are prioritizing reproductive health and rights and those that are seeking to curtail access and rights. The U.S. again received a failing grade. The report card, the most comprehensive of its kind, tracks multiple indicators of reproductive health and rights, including access to family planning, sex education, and abortion services. While the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris portends good news for reproductive health and rights at the federal level, the reshaping of the federal judiciary by the Trump/Pence administration could prove disastrous for decades to come for reproductive health, rights and justice.

Jennie Wetter, the Institute's director of public policy, said, “This year showed that nothing will stop “anti-choice” advocates from seeking to restrict access to reproductive health care. They sought in several states to use the pandemic as a pretext for denying access to abortion services by classifying it as nonessential health care. The Trump administration also sought to require, in the midst of a pandemic, that people seeking a medication abortion first see a doctor in person putting their health needlessly at risk. While courts blocked some of these and other attacks, opponents will keep trying. If they ultimately succeed, access to abortion, contraception, and other reproductive health services could be further curtailed.”

METHODOLOGY

Using thirteen criteria, the Institute's report card ranked each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia on four broad indicators relating to reproductive health and rights: effectiveness, prevention, affordability, and access. Based upon their composite scores (0-100), each state received a “core” grade (A, B, C, D or F), but some states received an additional “plus” or a “minus” for factors not reflected in the core grade.

STATE GRADES

Five states (California, Hawaii, New Jersey, Oregon, and Washington) received an “A” in this year's report. Twenty-three states received a failing grade: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

THE NATIONAL GRADE

For the second year in a row, the U.S., as a whole, received an ‘F’. Several factors account for the failing grade, most notably:

Title X

The Trump/Pence administration's imposition of a “domestic gag rule,” which

bars Title X clinics from counseling patients about abortion or referring them to abortion services, has had a devastating impact on a program providing family planning services to 4 million households a year. Several states and providers, including Planned Parenthood, have opted out rather than abide by the new restrictions. As traditional and trusted family providers drop out, the Trump administration has been awarding Title X grants to “crisis pregnancy centers” run by staunch anti-abortion advocates, some of whom do not even provide contraceptive services to clients.

Federal Courts

This year, after the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, President Trump was able to appoint his third justice to the U.S. Supreme Court. With Amy Coney Barrett joining fellow Trump appointees Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch on the bench it created a solid 6-3 conservative majority. Trump has also succeeded in stacking the lower federal courts. The U.S. Senate has confirmed over 200 Trump-nominated judges to the lower courts. In addition to restricting abortion rights, a more conservative federal judiciary could render rulings adversely affecting Title X, the coverage of contraception under the Affordable Care Act, and LGBTQ+ protections.

Sex Education

The Trump/Pence administration sought to slash federal support for evidence-based, comprehensive sexuality education. Instead, the administration promoted “sexual risk avoidance” programs that embrace the failed “abstinence-only” approach backed by conservatives.

LOOKING AHEAD

In releasing this year's report card, Wetter warned that, “While the Biden/Harris administration will be able to change a number of policies put into place by the previous administration, not everything will be easily or quickly fixed. Taking advantage of the changes in the U.S. Supreme Court and the lower federal courts, opponents of reproductive health and rights will unleash a flurry of legal challenges to any legislative and regulatory changes. If successful, those challenges could set back progress on reproductive health, rights, and justice issues for decades to come. Unfortunately, the people most impacted will be underserved populations, including low income people, the Black community, other communities of color, young people, and the LGBTQ+ community.”

For the complete report card and additional information, please visit: www.populationinstitute.org/reportcard

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