

# Reproductive Healthcare Must be Protected

A policy position statement of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) and the network of rape crisis centers throughout the Commonwealth

## POSITION

We believe in every person's right to make private healthcare choices that affect their bodies, safety, and lives—free from governmental intrusion. Every person deserves the freedom and bodily autonomy to access reproductive healthcare and abortion when they need it. We believe every person has the right to do so safely, legally, and without governmental intrusion or barriers.

When people have access to comprehensive healthcare rights—such as birth control, abortion, and maternity care—they are safer and healthier. When individuals are safe and healthy, their families and communities thrive.

Individuals—not the government—should be free to decide whether, how, and when they become pregnant and take responsibility for raising a child. To be truly equal, women, girls, and all people must have control over their own bodies and reproductive lives. This includes the decision about whether to have an abortion or to continue a pregnancy.

Children, adolescents, and adults who become pregnant through rape or incest must have the right to continue or end a rape-related pregnancy. We firmly stand behind the rights of victims and survivors<sup>1</sup> to access safe, legal abortion care. However, these freedoms must be available to all persons, not reserved only for those who have suffered sexual violence.

We strongly support existing reproductive healthcare rights and freedoms that are protected in Pennsylvania's statutes and constitution. We oppose any effort—legislative or otherwise—that attempts to limit or prohibit



abortion care through statute or the state constitution. It is imperative that our laws continue to protect Pennsylvanians' healthcare, privacy, equality, and freedom. Abortion bans and restrictions do the exact opposite.

## RATIONALE

Since 1975, PCAR and the network of rape crisis centers have worked to uphold consent and bodily autonomy as fundamental rights no person, law, or government should violate.

Our position on reproductive healthcare is an extension of the empowerment work Pennsylvania's rape crisis centers carry out every day in partnership with the survivors we serve. While we firmly believe all victims who become pregnant due to rape or incest must have access to reproductive healthcare options, we feel just as strongly that these options must be protected for all individuals.

<sup>1</sup>The terms, "victim" and "survivor" are used interchangeably throughout this document to be inclusive and respectful of the ways people may identify and the language they may prefer.

## When people have access to comprehensive healthcare rights, such as birth control, abortion, and maternity care, they are safer and healthier.

No one should have to disclose or prove they were sexually assaulted before accessing their right to essential healthcare. We have a deep understanding that not every person who is sexually assaulted identifies as a “victim,” or knows the violence they suffered was a crime. Furthermore, PCAR and the network of rape crisis centers view forced pregnancy as a violation of an individual’s bodily autonomy.

For these reasons, PCAR and the network of rape crisis centers advocate strongly to protect reproductive healthcare freedom and affirm safe, legal, accessible, and comprehensive reproductive healthcare in Pennsylvania. We caution that any restriction on individuals’ healthcare rights would only bring tremendous harm and suffering for the Commonwealth. This is especially true for women, girls, victims of sexual abuse and assault, people of color, people living in poverty, and LGBTQ people. In far too many cases, these restrictions would lead to death for pregnant Pennsylvanians.

We ask legislators and community members to join us in supporting every person’s freedom, privacy, and autonomy to make reproductive healthcare decisions that are best for them and that meet their needs and those of their families. Individuals—not government—are the experts in their own lives and must be trusted to decide what is best for their bodies, lives, and families.

## BACKGROUND

Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973 prior to PCAR becoming an official organization; however, through the years we have held firm that victims and survivors have the right to have complete information regarding medical and treatment options. In June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade and Planned Parenthood v. Casey in the decision for Dobbs v. Jackson. This ruling ended federally-protected abortion rights under the U.S. Constitution. Legislation is pending in the PA General Assembly that would restrict and/or ban abortion. In light of these events, we expand our position to protect the full range of reproductive healthcare for all people.

PCAR may issue statements regarding public policy affecting sexual violence victims and rape crisis centers. All position statements adopted by PCAR will be viewed as the official position statement of the network of rape crisis centers that comprise the Coalition; an individual rape crisis center, when publicly or privately voicing opposition to the statement, will do so in the capacity of an independent program and in no way as a member of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape.

## ABOUT PCAR

The mission of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape is to work to eliminate all forms of sexual violence and to advocate for the rights and needs of victims of sexual assault. PCAR partners with and represents the network of rape crisis centers that serves all 67 counties of the Commonwealth.

