

Mandatory Parental-Involvement Laws Threaten Young Women's Safety

There are two types of parental-involvement laws; those that require parental *notice* and those that require parental *consent* before a minor can seek abortion services. Parental-notice laws require prior written notification of parents before an abortion can be provided, with limited exceptions in some cases, such as physical abuse, incest, or medical emergency. These laws also may prescribe other preconditions including a mandatory waiting period following the parents' receipt of notification, and/or judicial intervention if there are compelling reasons to avoid parental notification.

Parental-consent laws require that minors obtain the consent of one or both parents before they can receive abortion services. In some states, parental-consent documentation must be notarized by one or both parents. The penalties for violating parental-consent laws range from civil liability and fines to imprisonment. The Supreme Court has ruled that parental-involvement requirements are constitutional so long as they include a judicial-bypass procedure to accommodate those young women who cannot involve their parents.

Ideally, a teen facing a crisis will seek the advice and counsel of those who care for her most and know her best. In fact, even in the absence of laws mandating parental involvement, many young women do turn to their parents when they are considering abortion. Unfortunately, some young women cannot involve their parents because physical violence or emotional abuse is present in their homes, because their pregnancies are the result of incest, or because they fear parental anger and disappointment. Mandatory parental-involvement (consent and notice) laws do not solve the problem of inadequate family communication; they only exacerbate a potentially dangerous situation.

In some circumstances, a teen facing an unintended pregnancy may need to travel outside her state of legal residence because that is where the closest abortion provider is located, or because she attends school out of state. Some young women feel compelled to travel to another state where there is a less stringent parental-involvement law or no such law at all to avoid involving their parents and maintain their privacy. In the most dire of circumstances, some pregnant young women who fear telling their parents may resort to illegal or self-induced abortions that may result in death. Despite these severe consequences, 38 states currently enforce laws that require a minor to obtain the consent of, or notify, an adult—typically a parent—prior to an abortion.¹ And five other states have minors' access laws that are either enjoined or not enforced.²

Federal Legislative History

In recent years, anti-choice legislators in Congress have attempted to pass two pieces of federal legislation that would impose draconian criminal parental-involvement laws on every state in the country. The first, called the "Child Custody Protection Act," criminalizes caring and loving adults—including grandparents, adult siblings, and religious counselors—who accompany a teen out of state for abortion care if the home state parental-involvement law has not been met.³ In 2006, anti-choice lawmakers raised the stakes, introducing for the first time the Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act (CIANA). In addition to the restrictive provisions in the CCPA, CIANA imposes a convoluted patchwork of parental-involvement laws on women and doctors across the country, making it virtually impossible for young women to access abortion services in another state.⁴ Both measures would threaten young women's health and deny them the support and guidance they need from responsible and caring adults.

Government Cannot Mandate Healthy and Open Communication in Families

Government cannot mandate healthy family communication. Laws requiring parental notice or consent actually may endanger the young women they purport to protect by increasing the possibility of illegal and self-induced abortion, family violence, suicide, later abortions, and unwanted childbirth.⁵

- A majority of young adults who are pregnant and seek abortion care indicate that their parents are aware that they are doing so.⁶ Furthermore, in states without parentalinvolvement laws, 61 percent of parents knew of their daughter's decision to terminate a pregnancy.⁷
- Even before reaching the point of having to discuss abortion, research indicates that a majority of teens talk to their parents about sex, STDs, and birth control.⁸
- Parental-involvement laws appear to have had little effect on reducing abortion rates among teens.⁹

Expert Medical and Health Organizations Oppose Parental-Involvement Mandates

- The American Medical Association takes the position that: "Physicians should not feel or be compelled to require minors to involve their parents before deciding whether to undergo an abortion. . . . [M]inors should ultimately be allowed to decide whether parental involvement is appropriate." 10
- The American Academy of Pediatrics also opposes parental-involvement laws: "Legislation mandating parental involvement does not achieve the intended benefit of promoting family communication but it does increase the risk of harm to the adolescent by delaying access to appropriate medical care. . . . [M]inors should not be compelled or

required to involve their parents in their decisions to obtain abortions, although they should be encouraged to discuss their pregnancies with their parents and other responsible adults."¹¹

 Other major medical groups also oppose parental-involvement laws, including the American Public Health Association, the Society for Adolescent Medicine, the American Medical Women's Association, the American College of Physicians, and the American Psychological Association.^{12,13,14,15,16}

Many Young Women Who Do Not Involve a Parent Have Good Reasons

Most young women find love, support, and safety in their home. Many, however, justifiably fear that they would be physically or emotionally abused if forced to disclose their pregnancy. Often, a young woman who does not involve a parent in her decision whether to have an abortion comes from a family where government-mandated disclosure would have devastating effects.

- An estimated 678,810 children were found to be victims of abuse or neglect in 2012.¹⁷ Young women considering abortion are particularly vulnerable because research shows that family violence is often at its worst during a family member's pregnancy.¹⁸
- Nearly half of pregnant teens who have a history of abuse report being assaulted during their pregnancy, most often by a family member.¹⁹ As the Supreme Court has recognized, "Mere notification of pregnancy is frequently a flashpoint for battering and violence within the family. The number of battering incidents is high during the pregnancy and often the worst abuse can be associated with pregnancy."²⁰
- Among minors who did not tell a parent of their abortion, 30 percent had experienced violence in their family, feared violence, or being forced to leave home.²¹ "My older sister got pregnant when she was seventeen. My mother pushed her against the wall, slapped her across the face and then grabbed her by the hair, pulled her through the living room out the front door and threw her off the porch. We don't know where she is now."²²
- In Idaho, a 13-year-old student named Spring Adams was shot to death by her father after he learned she was to terminate a pregnancy caused by his acts of incest.²³

Mandatory Parental-Consent and Notice Laws Endanger Young Women's Health

Parental-consent and notice laws endanger young women's health by forcing some women—even some from healthy, loving families—to turn to illegal or self-induced abortion, delay the procedure and increase the medical risk, or bear a child against their will.

- In Indiana, Rebecca Bell, a young woman who had a very close relationship with her parents, died from an illegal abortion that she sought because she did not want her parents to know about her pregnancy.²⁴ Indiana law required parental consent before she could have a legal abortion.²⁵
- The American Medical Association has noted that "[b]ecause the need for privacy may be compelling, minors may be driven to desperate measures to maintain the confidentiality of their pregnancies. They may run away from home, obtain a 'back alley' abortion, or resort to self-induced abortion. The desire to maintain secrecy has been one of the leading reasons for illegal abortion deaths since . . . 1973."²⁶
- Recognizing that maintaining confidentiality is essential to minors' willingness to obtain necessary health care related to sexual activity, all 50 states and the District of Columbia authorize minors to consent to the diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections without parental consent.²⁷ Many states explicitly include testing and treatment of HIV, with only one state requiring parental notification if a minor tests positive for HIV.²⁸ In addition, the Supreme Court has recognized that confidential access to contraceptives is essential for minors to exercise their constitutional right to privacy,²⁹ and federal law requires confidentiality for minors receiving family-planning services through publicly funded programs, such as Title X and Medicaid.³⁰
- According to Leslie Tarr Laurie, former president of Tapestry Health Systems, a Massachusetts-based health services provider: "Confidentiality is the cornerstone of our services We help teenagers avoid not only the costly and often tragic consequences of unintended pregnancy and childbearing, but also an early death from AIDS. The bottom line is, if we don't assure access to confidential health care, teenagers simply will stop seeking the care they desire and need."31

Judicial-Bypass Provisions Fail to Protect Young Women

In challenges to two different parental-involvement laws, the Supreme Court has ruled that a state statute requiring parental involvement must have some sort of bypass procedure, such as a judicial bypass, in order to be constitutional³² and that no one person may have an absolute veto over a minor's decision to have an abortion.³³ Thus, most states that require parental consent or notice provide—at least as a matter of law—a judicial bypass through which a young woman can seek a court order allowing an abortion without parental involvement.

But bypass procedures are often an inadequate alternative for young women, especially when courts are either not equipped or resistant to granting judicial bypasses. Even for adults, going to court for a judicial order is difficult. For young women without a lawyer, it is overwhelming and at times impossible. Some young women cannot maneuver the legal procedures required or cannot attend hearings scheduled during school hours. Others do not go to court or delay

going because they fear that the proceedings are not confidential or that they will be recognized by people at the courthouse. Many experience fear and distress and do not want to reveal intimate details of their personal lives to strangers.³⁴ The time required to schedule the court proceeding may result in a delay of a week or more, thereby increasing the health risks of the abortion.³⁵ And in many instances, courts are not equipped to handle bypass proceedings in accord with constitutional regulations.³⁶ Worse yet, some young women who do manage to arrange a hearing face judges who are vehemently anti-choice and who routinely deny petitions of minors who show that they are mature or that the bypass is in their best interest, despite rulings by the Supreme Court that the bypass must be granted in those circumstances.³⁷

- In denying the petition of one young woman, a Missouri judge stated: "Depending upon what ruling I make I hold in my hands the power to kill an unborn child. In our society it's a lot easier to kill an unborn child than the most vicious murderer. . . . I don't believe that this particular juvenile has sufficient intellectual capacity to make a determination that she is willing to kill her own child."³⁸
- A Toledo, Ohio judge denied a bypass for a 17-year-old, an "A" student who planned to attend college and who testified she was not financially or emotionally prepared for college and motherhood at the same time, stating that the girl had "not had enough hard knocks in her life." 39
- In Louisiana, a judge denied a 15-year-old a bypass petition after asking her a series of inappropriate questions, including what the minor would say to the fetus about her decision. Her request was granted only after a rehearing by six appellate court judges.⁴⁰
- A Pennsylvania study found that of the 60 judicial districts in the state, only eight were able to provide complete information about Pennsylvania's judicial-bypass procedure. Some county courts referred minors to anti-choice crisis pregnancy centers that typically provide false and misleading information about abortion and pressure women to carry their pregnancies to term.⁴¹
- The Alabama Supreme Court upheld a trial court's denial of a petition for a 17-year-old because the minor's testimony appeared "rehearsed" and she did not show "any emotion." The trial court refused to find that the minor was mature and well-informed enough to make her own decision or that an abortion was in her best interests—despite the fact that the 17-year-old high school senior had a 3.0 grade point average, had been accepted to college, had discussed her options with the father of the fetus, had spoken to a doctor, a counselor, her godmother, and her 20-year-old sister, was able to describe the abortion procedure, was informed about its risks, and had testified that her legal guardian had thrown a teenage relative out of the house when she became pregnant.⁴²

The Effects of Teenage Childbearing Can Be Devastating

The forced childbearing among teenagers that can result from parental-consent and notice laws can have devastating effects on the health and life chances of young women and their children.

- Approximately three in 10 American women become pregnant before the age of 20.⁴³
 About six percent of 15 to 19 year olds become pregnant each year.⁴⁴
- Fewer than four in 10 teen mothers graduate from high school and less than two percent graduate college by age 30. 45
- Forty-one percent of mothers who gave birth before age 20 were living in poverty within the first year of their child's birth, while the chances of living in poverty rose to 50 percent when their child reached the age of three.⁴⁶
- Nearly two-thirds of teen mothers received some type of public benefits within the first year after their children were born.⁴⁷
- Infants of teen mothers are 25 percent more likely to suffer from low birthweight (less than 5.5 pounds) than those born to older mothers.⁴⁸ The children of teenage parents have an increased risk of abuse and neglect and are more likely to become teenage parents themselves, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty.⁴⁹
- About two-thirds of children born to teen mothers earned a high-school diploma, compared to 81 percent of children born to older mothers.⁵⁰
- Teen mothers are likely to have a second child relatively soon after their first about a quarter of teen mothers have a second child within 24 months of the first. This can further inhibit their ability to finish school, keep a job, and escape poverty.⁵¹

Making Abortion Less Necessary Among Teenagers Requires A Comprehensive Effort to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Given the potentially devastating consequences of teen pregnancy, abortion among teenagers should be made less necessary, not more difficult and dangerous. A comprehensive, evidence-based approach to promoting adolescent reproductive health and reducing teen pregnancy will require an array of components, including:

- age-appropriate, comprehensive sex education with medically accurate information;
- access to comprehensive health-care coverage, and confidential health services, including family planning,;
- community programs that offer young people practical life skills and encourage teens to delay sexual activity; and

Such an approach has never been implemented on a significant scale in the United States, and several studies of specific HIV-prevention and sex education programs demonstrate positive outcomes such as increased knowledge, delayed sexual activity, reduction in the frequency of sex, or increased contraceptive use.⁵² The wisest policy gives teenagers the tools they need to avoid pregnancy and forsakes misguided efforts to insert the government into delicate family situations.

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¹ The 38 states with enforceable mandatory consent and notice laws are: AL, AZ, AR, CO, DE, FL, GA, ID, IN, IL, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, MO, NE, NC, ND, NH, OH, OK, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WV, WI, WY. NARAL Pro-Choice America & NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation, *Who Decides?: The Status of Women's Reproductive Rights in the United States* (26th ed. 2017), *at* www.WhoDecides.org.

- ² The five states with laws that are either enjoined or not enforced are: CA, MT, NV, NJ, NM. NARAL Pro-Choice America & NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation, *Who Decides?: The Status of Women's Reproductive Rights in the United States* (26th ed. 2017), *at* www.WhoDecides.org.
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- ⁴ H.R.748, 109th Cong. (2006); S.403, 109th Cong. (2006); H.R.1063, 110th Cong. (2007); H.R.634, 111th Cong. (2009); H.R.2299, 112th Cong. (2011); S.1241, 112th Cong. (2011); H.R.732 113th Cong. (2013); S.369, 113th Cong. (2013).
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