



# As COVID-19 Rages and West Virginians' Health Continues to Fall Behind, Lawmakers Prioritize Forcing People to Give Birth

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. – On day 2 of the 2022 West Virginia Legislative Session, the House of Delegates Health and Human Resources Committee did not prioritize COVID-19 or any other major health-related concern in West Virginia. Instead, they passed two cruel bills attacking the constitutional right to an abortion.

Recent reports have ranked West Virginia as among the worst states in the nation for heart disease, substance use disorder rates, fatal overdoses, obesity, smoking rates, diabetes, and more. There are currently thousands of COVID-19 infections in the state with numerous hospital ICUs reporting a shortage of beds. Even Gov. Jim Justice is reportedly “very ill” with the virus.

Instead of tackling any of these serious issues, the committee advanced bills banning abortions after 15 weeks and imposing intrusive requirements regarding the disposal of fetal tissue. These are the first of several forced-birth bills expected this session. Eleven such bills have already been introduced.

Organizations working to defend West Virginians’ reproductive rights sounded the alarm, saying these bills are intended to end access to lifesaving healthcare.

“These bills are about banning abortion and making abortion as hard as possible for West Virginians to access, plain and simple,” said **Katie Quinonez, Executive Director of Women’s Health Center of West Virginia**, the state’s only abortion provider. “When someone has made the decision to have an abortion, they should be able to get one as soon as they decide without facing restrictions that force them to delay care, get on a plane to another state, or carry a pregnancy against their will.”

**Delegate Danielle Walker**, a member of the House Health Committee who voted “No” on both bills, said, “As an abortion patient, mother, and elected official, it amazes me that my freedom to make conscious decisions about my body and my family will be at the mercy of an overreaching government. Abortion stigma and bans on health care harm marginalized communities — communities where folks already struggle with food deserts, lack of affordable childcare, and low wages that are not enough to make ends meet.

“My reproductive healthcare is my business and responsibility, and my voice should matter in the decision to become a parent,” Walker added.

**Joseph Cohen, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of West Virginia**, said, “This is the day that forced birth extremists in West Virginia have been waiting on for years now. These bills, if they become law, will fall hardest on the poor and working class. If these lawmakers’ loved ones need an abortion, you can bet they will have the resources to go out of state to

seek the care they need. We will not stand by while politicians take away people's rights to their own bodies."

**Margaret Chapman-Pomponio, chief executive officer of WV FREE**, said politicians are in a dangerous game of trying to play doctor.

"There are too many in the legislature who are obsessed with abortion restrictions. Their priorities are out of step with what West Virginians want and need. They're trying to divide us and drag us backwards. We can't let them. If elected leaders want to engage in the business of pregnancy, they should focus on truly improving maternity care, and increasing access to birth control. WV FREE will share a proactive agenda that would help carry our state forward and we are hopeful to get bipartisan support for it."

**Alisa Clements, director of public affairs for Planned Parenthood South Atlantic**, said: "State lawmakers are trying to interfere with personal medical decisions, block access to essential health care, and force people to give birth against their will. Politicians have no place interfering in anyone's pregnancy decisions. State lawmakers should instead prioritize policies that help people and communities thrive — not restrict people's personal freedoms and take away their health care."

#### **At a Glance: West Virginia Health Statistics**

[No. 1 in fatal overdose rate](#)

[No. 1 in obesity rate](#)

[Highest percentage of adult cigarette smokers](#)

[Second-Highest Percentage of adolescent cigarette smokers](#)

[No. 2 in deaths caused by heart disease](#)