

“Mind Your Own Damn Business”: Why Governor Walz Is Right that The Right to Control Your Body Should Not Be Based on Geography

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Minnesota Governor, Tim Walz (Walz), has been [selected as Vice President Kamala Harris’ running mate](#). Throughout the campaign, especially during the vice presidential debate with JD Vance, Walz consistently brought up how, [in Minnesota](#), a woman’s right to bodily autonomy is protected.¹ In fact, following his debate performance, many [online commenters](#) discussed how great [Walz makes out Minnesota to be](#). But is it *really* that great to be a woman in Minnesota? The answer, when compared to other states, is a resounding yes.

Though reproductive rights—and specifically the right to access abortion—have always been [crucial political talking points](#), the topic became an [even more contentious issue](#) after the Supreme Court overturned [Roe v. Wade](#) (*Roe*) in the [Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization](#) (*Dobbs*) decision. [Roe](#) was a landmark decision that held that the right to an abortion is constitutionally protected in the United States. After *Roe*, [abortion care became safer, more accessible](#), and, most importantly, legal. The [Dobbs decision removed the constitutional protections](#) for abortion and left women’s right to make reproductive healthcare determinations up to individual states.

Post-*Dobbs*, [many women feared](#) that they would not be able to access abortion healthcare, but Walz immediately stepped into action to protect women’s right to choose in

¹ This post uses the words “woman” and “women” when referring to individuals who may become pregnant. The author recognizes that individuals who identify as men or nonbinary can and do become pregnant and deserve access to reproductive healthcare as well.

Minnesota. His actions aligned with his long-time pledge that, while in office, “[Minnesota would not turn the clock back on reproductive rights](#).” Walz stood behind that promise, and the day after the *Dobbs* decision, he signed [Emergency Executive Order 22-16](#), reaffirming that Minnesotans would continue to have access to reproductive healthcare. His [Executive Order](#) included language that protected individuals from extradition when seeking reproductive healthcare in Minnesota—essentially making Minnesota a “safe haven” for out-of-state women seeking medical care.

In January 2023, [Walz signed the Protect Reproductive Options Act](#) (PRO Act) into law. The [PRO Act](#) codified abortion access rights into Minnesota law and ensured a fundamental right to make autonomous decisions about reproductive healthcare, including abortion. Walz’s efforts to pass the PRO Act made [Minnesota the first state to codify abortion rights](#) into law after the reversal of *Roe*, which he has [spoken of proudly](#).

Then, in March 2023, Walz [signed the Reproductive Freedom Defense Act](#). This legislation [protected individuals and healthcare providers from prosecution](#) in other states for receiving or providing reproductive healthcare services in Minnesota. Notably, the [Reproductive Freedom Defense Act](#) prohibits the release of patient reproductive health records via subpoena to other states. It also [prohibits Minnesota judges from issuing arrest warrants](#) for people in Minnesota charged with a reproductive healthcare-related crime in another state. The *Dobbs* decision was [frightening for women](#), with many wondering what might happen to them if they needed an abortion after their state passed restrictions. Fortunately, women across Minnesota did not have to worry about abortion restrictions with a governor who swiftly took action to put legal protections in place for the fundamental human right to bodily autonomy.

Unfortunately, this was not the case for millions of women across the United States whose fears were not met with protections and were instead exacerbated by [increasing abortion restrictions and bans](#). Women in Georgia and Texas, for instance, now face some of the most [restrictive reproductive legislation](#) in the country. Georgia enacted a [six-week abortion ban](#) after *Dobbs*, which is impractical and effectively bans abortions because many women are [unaware they are pregnant at such an early stage](#). In Texas, [abortion is illegal](#) except in some narrow instances. The effects of these laws have been devastating. Women living in these states have few, if any, options when making decisions about their healthcare. And [abortion is healthcare](#). Abortions are a [medical treatment](#) option and are used to address serious pregnancy complications, including eclampsia and placental abruption. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has stated that sometimes abortion may be “[the only measure to preserve a woman’s health or save her life](#).” Medical [professionals make these difficult health decisions with and for patients](#) who are often eager to start a family. The criminalization of abortion has been [denounced by the World Health Organization and the ACOG](#), yet many patients and providers face [criminal punishments](#) for receiving or providing abortions.

Since *Dobbs*, the restrictions placed on reproductive health have already caused an [increase in the total maternal mortality rate](#) in states that restrict access to abortion services. [Amber Thurman](#) was a young woman who lived in Georgia and died after a rare complication from taking an abortion medication. Georgia’s restrictive laws led her doctors to [delay a lifesaving procedure](#), fearing prosecution. Sadly, her death was [preventable](#), and she would likely be alive if the medical professionals in Georgia were empowered to use their medical training and discretion in treatment instead of being bound by archaic laws.

Walz brought recognition to Amber Thurman's tragic death in the vice presidential debate to [call attention to the geographical disparities](#) in women's rights across the United States. Thurman's family [issued a statement](#) commending Walz and his efforts to protect women's healthcare and lives. In a harrowing statement, Walz suggested that [Thurman's life could have been saved](#) had she lived in Minnesota and argued the absurdity of human rights for women in this country that varies by geography.

Walz makes an excellent point: why should women in Minnesota have more robust bodily autonomy rights than women in Georgia? Presently, [a woman's state of residence dictates her rights](#) regarding healthcare determinations. This disproportionately affects [low-income](#) women and [women of color](#). While women with [more financial resources may be able to travel](#) to a state to obtain the healthcare they need, many cannot. Income barriers exacerbate and compound the already [disparate medical treatment outcomes](#) for women of color. In Mississippi, ["Black women are three times likelier than white women to die from a pregnancy-related cause."](#) The intersectionality of Black women in the United States means that restrictions on reproductive rights will [negatively impact them more](#) than their white counterparts.

Looking forward, the United States needs to address the geographical inequalities women face regarding their reproductive healthcare. It is not only a profound injustice, but it also unfairly affects already marginalized communities. While [legal challenges to state legislation](#) that restrict abortion access [continue to be heard in state courts](#), there are still *significant* steps that need to be made to ensure equity in reproductive healthcare access in the United States. We need not wait for the lower courts to determine women's rights; we need national protections. Minnesota may be a great place to live as a woman, but what about the rest of the women across the country? The obvious answer is to reinstate the constitutional protections afforded in *Roe* or

for Congress to pass protective legislation. The outcome of the 2024 presidential election will undoubtedly influence how reproductive rights are addressed in the next four years, with many hoping that Vice President [Kamala Harris' progressive policies](#) will restore many of the previously protected rights to bodily autonomy. That is, if she can win a [historically close](#) race. Still, and until then, proponents of abortion bans should follow Walz's advice and "[mind your own damn business](#)."