

Inside Philanthropy

The 50th Anniversary Party That Wasn't

Elizabeth Barajas-Román, Guest Contributor | January 20, 2023



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This Sunday, January 22, we should be celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. Instead, you know what happened: The U.S. Supreme Court stripped away a person's federal right to an abortion 50 years after affirming that right. Just a few months later, there are now abortion bans in at least 13 states, with *half* of all states attempting to ban or restrict abortion. This would-be anniversary is a painful reminder of the chasm between the world we desperately want and deserve, and the world we have.

So why do I feel inspired, hopeful and confident? Because I have a 30,000-foot view of the collaborative impact and vital work of women's funds. These community-based foundations invest in the leadership of women and girls, especially Black, Latina, Native American, and other women and girls of color, as well as transgender women and gender-nonconforming people – and are doing some of the country's most impactful philanthropy around abortion access.

Fifty years ago when *Roe* was first passed, there weren't any women's funds. Now, there are hundreds around the world, on every continent except Antarctica. Women's funds exist in every state that has banned or is moving to ban or restrict abortion – and sometimes, that women's foundation is the *only* gender and racial justice organization in that community. Women's funds have earned trust and have grown deeply connected networks over the past five decades. Data shows that on average, women's funds move money nine months faster than traditional philanthropic channels. That matters because the abortion landscape changes by the day, and women's funds know how to get money to the right community partners, fast. For all of these reasons, supporting women's funds is the best way to solidify the local philanthropic infrastructure needed to fight for reproductive justice for all.

Some funds are lobbying and working with state governments to pass important birth control and abortion protections into law; others are raising awareness and building support in their communities; others are rapidly raising and distributing money to groups that provide practical help to abortion seekers.

For example:

- The Women's Fund of Rhode Island is working to help pass the Equality in Abortion Coverage Act (EACA), which would give equal access to abortion care to people who use

Medicaid and state employee health insurance, as well as legislation that would allow pharmacists to prescribe birth control directly and to codify no-cost birth control coverage from the Affordable Care Act into state law.

- The Women’s Foundation of Minnesota has strengthened its longstanding commitment to reproductive justice. Since Roe was overturned, it has made grants totaling more than \$125,000 through a [Community Response Fund](#) that makes critical investments directly to organizations addressing reproductive justice and wellbeing, such as local clinics. The foundation also held get-out-the-vote events for #Roeverember.
- Through its Impact Collaborative, the Women's Fund Miami-Dade in Florida holds free virtual sessions to educate the public and create conversations about reproductive justice. Recent topics have included the importance of intersectionality in this space and amplifying the voices of faith-based organizations that support abortion.
- Anticipating the Dobbs decision, the Women’s Fund of Omaha in Nebraska successfully helped block a “trigger ban” bill in the state legislature that would have automatically banned abortions statewide once Roe’s protections were overturned, with no exceptions for rape or incest. The group says, “Abortion care remains available in Nebraska — and we will continue to do everything we can to keep it that way.” That includes [Policy Power Hour](#) education sessions, creating pro-abortion social media posts to share, organizing marches and rallies, and helping Nebraskans contact their senators and write letters to the editor in favor of reproductive freedom.

There are countless other women’s funds doing this type of work, including in states with bans — though many of those funds prefer not to be named in the media. Not surprisingly, in states that have already enacted or have pending abortion restrictions, women, girls and gender-expansive people are at greatest risk for losing care, and women’s funds have an even greater need for support. I’m hearing from women’s fund leadership in some of these locations that their desire to do more is only restrained by their fear of losing funding from conservative donors. They must grapple with the toll that a loss of funding would take on their work in other critical areas of reproductive justice, such as improving maternal health and childcare access, and reducing gender-based violence. They shouldn’t have to make this choice.

My ask is for philanthropy to step up to ensure that every women’s fund, no matter where it’s located, is resourced to unlock their vital work in support of abortion rights and reproductive justice.

Expanding human rights is the fight of our lifetime, and it’s work that’s never finished. Right now, we’re up against incredible forces of extremism, misogyny and white supremacy. But because of the work of women’s funds, it certainly won’t take us another 50 years, or even a generation, to restore our rights. To meet our goals for tomorrow, we need philanthropy’s greater-than-ever investment in women’s funds today.

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