



June 28, 2022

## Statement from the Women of Cleveland City Council

A Clevelander will die because of the Supreme Court's disastrous opinion overturning *Roe v. Wade*. We don't know who they are or where they are now. Maybe they spent this past weekend enjoying a walk at Edgewater. Maybe they played with their kids all Saturday at Lonnie Burton Park. Maybe they were in the crowd at Tri-C's Jazz Fest. We cannot know for sure right now.

We will only know who they are when they die of sepsis after they are not able to access abortion services after a miscarriage. We will know who they are when we have to pass a Resolution of Condolence in their name through Cleveland City Council. We will know who they are when we have to drive to Columbus and ask the Ohio Statehouse to pass a bill in their honor changing the State's laws.

This story has played out before. It was Savita Halappanava's death in Ireland who pushed that country to change their laws. It was a woman identified as Agnieszka T. in Poland. And now, it will happen here after the actions of the Supreme Court and Governor DeWine this week.

Beyond those who will lose their lives, the restrictions on abortion access will fundamentally alter the rights of all who can get pregnant within the City of Cleveland. It strips our population of their bodily autonomy and of fundamental healthcare services. It further impacts maternal health in a city where our women and Black women in particular are suffering. It harms our families in a city with one of the highest poverty rates in the county.

Abortion access laws are largely controlled by the State. But we do have some power. *First*, as members of Cleveland City Council, we can affirm our strong and open support of abortion access. *Second*, we are committed to investigating next steps that the City of Cleveland can take. Some of this work may be possible short term. Some of it is long term. Some we might learn might not be possible. But each of these ideas, in our opinion, is worth pursuing.

1. **City Insurance Plans:** The City of Cleveland is currently self-insured, with our insurance plans managed by Medical Mutual and Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield. We need to understand what abortion services are available under these plans and whether we need to modify these plans to increase abortion access and plan for individuals who will need to go out of state.
2. **Non-Enforcement Commitments:** The City of Cleveland needs to coordinate with our City and County prosecutors and the Cleveland Police Department to identify policies of non-enforcement. We need to focus our limited public safety resources on fighting the crime and gun violence that plagues our neighborhoods, not enforcing restrictions on healthcare rights. Prosecutor O'Malley's commitment on June 27th to non-enforcement is a good first step.
3. **Data Collection Policies:** As we face a post-*Roe* world, advocates and local leaders in reproductive rights have raised concerning questions about ways that the State might try to identify who is pregnant. Period tracking apps have been a subject of media

conversation. The City should evaluate its policies to identify ways to prevent unnecessary surveillance and data collection.

4. **Transportation Access:** Ohio's "Heartbeat Bill" restricts abortion past 6 weeks, which is before most people know they are pregnant. Providing those who are pregnant with access to safe and affordable transportation to a nearby state with protected abortion access will be crucial. We join others in the call to expand travel stipends and/or reimbursement for traveling out-of-state. And we join the call to provide direct financial support to Cleveland's remaining abortion clinic and abortion access funds.
5. **Paid Family Leave:** A major barrier for working people seeking healthcare is the ability to take time off of work. We recognize the impossible choice many women and families must make between addressing one's health or getting a paycheck. Providing paid time off for people seeking abortion, as well as supporting paid time off for people to meet any subsequent physical or emotional needs, will drastically reduce the barrier to accessing care. We join in the on-going conversation about an improved family leave policy at the City.
6. **Comprehensive Reproductive Health:** In the midst of the work to protect abortion access, we should all work for ways to decrease the need for abortions and improve maternal outcomes. Such policies include supporting comprehensive sexual education, increasing access to contraception and other forms of birth control, and supporting healthcare access.
7. **Remaining Vigilant:** As public servants, we recommit ourselves to the work of staying vigilant against any future actions by the State of Ohio that could further undermine or erode Clevelanders' fundamental rights. We will also continue to benchmark Cleveland's response to this crisis against best practices in other cities. We anticipate a new era of solidarity and alignment from city to city, as communities push back at the local level against these unjust laws.
8. **Reminding Citizens That They Are Powerful:** We recognize that residents in our Wards battle daily against challenges and systems that inhibit their ability to participate in the democratic process. But as elected officials, it is incumbent upon us to show our residents that they are powerful changemakers within their own communities -- and we must do everything we can to encourage them to exercise their vote. We ask that you join us in this effort.



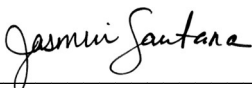
Deborah Gray  
Council Member, Ward 4



Stephanie Howse  
Council Member, Ward 7



Rebecca Maurer  
Councilmember, Ward 12



Jasmin Santana  
Council Member, Ward 14



Jenny Spencer  
Council Member, Ward 15