

NEWS & POLITICS

# Out of sight, out of mind

More than a year after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned federal abortion protections, midwest abortion funds and providers navigate increased client loads and falling donations.

by **Maia McDonald**  
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Sekile Nzinga, a Chicago Abortion Fund community member, poses for a photo during the annual Chicago Abortion Fund Fund-A-Thon in 2022. Credit: Ally Almore

More than a year after the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 case that legalized abortions nationwide, local abortion funds and abortion care providers are still reeling as many navigate a dip in donations and a new state of reproductive health care in the United States.

When the conservative-leaning court first *struck down Roe v. Wade* in June 2022, many channeled the anger and despair they felt at the loss of federally protected reproductive rights into donating en masse to abortion funds—organizations that provide support to people seeking abortions. The help provided by these funds varies, but most offer aid for clinical vouchers, travel expenses, childcare, clothing, medication, emotional and wraparound support, doctor's visits, medical procedures, and more.

With increased media attention on the ruling bringing the issue of abortion care to many for the first time in years, donating to these funds was an action many felt they could take to help ensure the longevity of groups still able to provide this necessary form of health care.



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The surge in donations to abortion funds became key in weathering the subsequent influx of clients from neighboring states where abortion was newly illegal (states like Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and others had so-called trigger laws that outlawed abortion immediately upon *Roe v. Wade's* repeal). But local abortion funds in Illinois, like others across the country, are now serving an increased load of clients while individual donations have largely waned.

Megan Jeyifo, executive director of the Chicago Abortion Fund (CAF), believes the decrease in donations doesn't show a decline in overall support for abortion. Instead, she says it's indicative of waning media attention on the issue and other political crises people are currently experiencing. "People are compelled to take action when abortion is front and center in the news, and I think we're also dealing with many competing crises in this country. There are so many very worthy causes that people could contribute to, and I totally understand that," Jeyifo says.

She continues, "I think that the state of this world is in constant crisis, and I think a lot of people put their money [into] what's in front of them. When you don't have abortion blasting in the news, . . . you don't have public awareness. I think that it's out of sight, out of mind for some people."

Though CAF hasn't yet had to stop accepting clients or close their doors altogether whilst fundraising—like many others across the country—Jeyifo says it's still been difficult work to do. "I don't think there is any precedent for what we have experienced over the last 14 months. It has been a fucking nightmare," she says.

Many who work in abortion care say it has long been clear that the longevity of *Roe v. Wade* was never promised and its protection is not far-reaching enough. In the lead-up to the 2022 decision, Jeyifo and her colleagues spent time preparing for potential changes to the national abortion landscape. But Jeyifo says expecting these changes did not make maneuvering through them any easier, especially as Illinois remains one of a handful of midwestern states where abortion is legal. (On October 7, Ohio voters enshrined abortion rights in the state's constitution, a major victory for reproductive rights advocates.)



Diana Parker-Kafka speaks during a press conference for the Justice For All pledge, announced by Mayor Lori Lightfoot in 2022.

Credit: Courtesy Midwest Access Coalition

"Our costs are going to continue to go up as the travel gets more complex for people all across the country," says Diana Parker-Kafka, executive director of Midwest Access Coalition (MAC), another local abortion fund that serves people in Illinois and Minnesota, the only two states in the region with full abortion protections before Ohio's election-day legalization of abortion. "We provide this service for folks traveling to or from the midwest—and that ends up being the entire country because of how Illinois

and Michigan and Minnesota are all hubs in this country for abortion care, specifically Illinois because of what its legislators have done to protect and expand abortion access for people not just in Illinois, but our neighbors around us.”

Though abortions are legal in Illinois, and Governor J.B. Pritzker has long committed himself to ensuring that it remains a state where reproductive rights are protected, many local abortion funds have had their work cut out for them in a post-*Dobbs* United States.

Immediately following the ruling, CAF saw its funding flip from being mostly made up of gifts from foundations or philanthropic endeavors, to individual donations. But Jeyifo says that has since changed and individual donations have slowed again, while its caseload and expenses have only increased. CAF currently supports around 200 to 300 people a week, an increase from its previous caseload of fewer than 200 people in all of 2018.

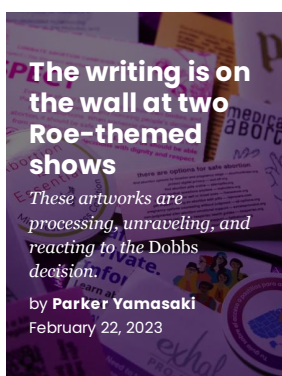
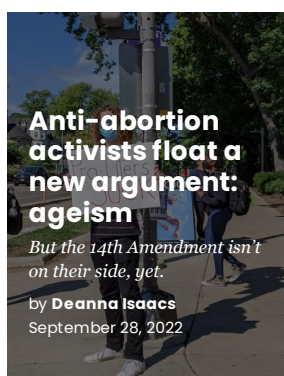
Before the *Dobbs* ruling, it provided around \$175 for abortion expenses and \$120 in wraparound support per person. Now, those numbers have ballooned to \$360 and \$390, respectively, Jeyifo says. CAF doesn't turn away any of its callers, so bumping up its staff to meet the demand was a necessary step to keep up with the increased demand, she says.

Similarly, Parker-Kafka says the financial needs of one of their clients can vary greatly. But the average cost per client has jumped from \$345 in 2021 to \$526 this year.

MAC is one of several abortion funds to receive financial support through a fundraiser hosted by U.S. representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Parker-Kafka says national attention over the past year has led to more donations than in previous ones, and the organization has increased its fundraising efforts, leaving MAC in a comfortable place.

Her team hopes to do what it can to ease the load on other local abortion funds strained by the increased load they're receiving from neighboring states. “We really hope that donors keep showing up—if not for us, [for] another organization,” Parker-Kafka says. “There's always, always more need. There's always those abortion funds that have to close their hotline down really early in the month as they run out of money, and so the donations are significantly more than previous years, but there's still not enough for the country.” 📧

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