

## IN THEIR OPINION

# Overturning Roe v. Wade is an attack on human rights

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**W**e have just embarked on a health and human rights crisis. The Supreme Court has officially overturned Roe v. Wade, prohibiting millions of women across the country from the constitutional right to access abortion.

For years, abortion rights have been framed around a debate of morality, religion and culture. However, we cannot deny how deeply interconnected health-care, economic security, and sexual violence are to the discussion.

And I'm not alone in my sentiment.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen shared her concerns at a recent Senate hearing. She said, "eliminating the rights of women to make decisions about when and whether to have children would have very damaging effects on the economy and would set women back decades."

We cannot allow ourselves to backslide into autocratic patriarchy.

Researchers found that the economic consequences of being denied an abortion are devastating, with women who were turned away at an abortion clinic seeing a staggering 78% increase in their overdue debts.

As the CEO of YWCA Northern New Jersey, I see women disproportionately impacted by earnings disparities along with the lack of access to healthcare and support.

I have witnessed firsthand the struggles women encounter when they lose a job or have to endure the trauma of sexual abuse. We take a hands-on ap-

proach to supporting women and girls of all ages with essential support professional programs and trauma services.

However, I know that this decision that will ban abortion in some states will only worsen these circumstances and, no doubt, result in devastating health implications for millions of women, particularly women of color who already experience barriers to abortion and other maternal health services.

The maternal death rate increased significantly from 2019 to 2020 for Black and Hispanic women, with Black mothers in the United States three times as likely to die from pregnancy and childbirth as white women.

A recent study estimated that banning abortion in the United States would lead to a 21% increase in pregnancy-related deaths, with Black women facing the most significant increase at a staggering 33%.

The health and well-being of women of color are under attack.

This decision will also have devastating consequences for victims of sexual violence.

At YWCA Northern New Jersey, we operate healingSPACE, Bergen County's only sexual violence resource center. HealingSPACE provides individual counseling, facilitates support groups, and accompanies survivors through medical, legal and other proceedings.

Through this work, we witness firsthand the profound impact sexual violence has on survivors and the physical and mental trauma that follows. Denying abortion would only deepen the trauma of sexual abuse victims and tie them to their abusers.

Evidence shows that a lack of access to abortion increases the chances that women in abusive

relationships will experience physical abuse from their partners.

Women of color are more likely to suffer the most from lack of abortion access, given that they experience intimate partner violence at higher rates.

Gov. Phil Murphy has tried to shield the women of New Jersey from this decision by signing the Freedom of Reproductive Choice Act, effectively keeping Roe v. Wade in place at the state level.

Although this legislation is a step in the right direction for women in the Garden State, all of us on the frontlines at YWCA Northern New Jersey know this is not enough to ensure universal access and protection for all women.

We must encourage our legislators to pursue measures that eliminate out-of-pocket costs and unnecessary financial barriers for women seeking abortions.

We need to protect those women from out of state and provide reproductive health care services to those who can't afford them. We must create a reproductive health access fund that would offer training grants to prospective abortion providers to cover the cost of abortion care and financial security for abortion centers.

I am a mother of twins, and starting a family was a choice I made with my husband.

Everyone deserves to make that choice instead of being forced into motherhood or fatherhood by the lack of abortion access.

That is our right as human beings.

Helen Archontou is the CEO of YWCA Northern New Jersey.

