

Republican Louisiana governor enacts law restricting access to abortion pills

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On May 24, Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry, a Republican, signed a bill making Louisiana the first state in the United States to classify two abortion-inducing medications—mifepristone and misoprostol—as Schedule IV drugs, or “controlled substances,” making unprescribed possession of the medications a crime punishable by up to five years in prison and fines of up to \$5,000. With no real fight from the Democratic Party, the bill predictably passed both the Republican-controlled House of Representatives on May 21 by a 64-29 vote, and the Senate on May 23, by 29-7.

This classification places abortion pills in the same category as anti-anxiety medications Ambien, Klonopin, Valium, and Xanax, despite neither mifepristone nor misoprostol being recognized by the medical community as posing an addiction threat. This reclassification is a direct attack on democratic rights, extending the Supreme Court’s 2022 decision to restrict the right to an abortion through the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

Louisiana’s “trigger law,” which came into force after *Roe* was overturned, has been heavily enforced since. With a near-total ban on both surgical and medication-induced abortions, except in the case where the mother’s life is threatened, the closest abortion clinic for Louisiana residents is now hundreds of miles away.

According to the Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR), in a filing in the 2020 case *June Medical Services v. Russo*, prior to the overturning of *Roe*, “approximately 10,000 women obtain abortions in Louisiana each year,” further stating, “The district court in our case found that ‘abortion has been extremely safe in Louisiana’ for decades, with ‘particularly low rates of serious complications’ when ‘compared with childbirth and with medical procedures

that are far less regulated than abortion.’”

Under the new law restricting the most common form of medical abortion, doctors will require a special license to prescribe these drugs, and prescriptions will be entered into a state database accessible by law enforcement without a warrant. This blatant intrusion poses a severe threat to patient privacy and violates the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Furthermore, it exposes physicians to unwarranted investigations and political persecution.

The two pills, mifepristone and misoprostol, taken together as a two-drug regimen allowing women to safely terminate a pregnancy at home, currently account for over 60 percent of all abortions in the US. While pregnant women are explicitly exempt from punishment under the new measure, anyone assisting them, including healthcare providers, could face prosecution.

The US Supreme Court’s abolition of the constitutional right to abortion not only exposed the Democratic Party, which had control of the House and Senate, including the executive branch, as impotent and incapable of defending basic human rights in its refusal to codify abortion rights, it also served as a direct assault on the poor and working class, particularly in the southern US. Compounded with the closure of maternity wards and rural hospitals throughout the South, the outlawing of abortion will only exacerbate the already climbing maternal mortality rate.

In Florida, with a population of 22.24 million, 86 percent of rural hospitals lack labor and delivery services, the highest percentage in the nation. North Dakota follows with 79 percent (population 780,000), and then Louisiana with 75 percent (population 4.59 million), compared to a national average of 55 percent. In Georgia (population 10.91 million), 18 of its 30 rural

hospitals are at risk of closing.

According to a 2023 report from the March of Dimes, nearly 27 percent of parishes in Louisiana are classified as “maternity care deserts.” This will leave tens of thousands of poor and working class people without access to birthing facilities or maternity care providers. The report goes on to state that 12.1 percent of women in Louisiana have no access to a maternity ward within 30 minutes of their location, compared to the national average of 9.7 percent.

This systematic dismantling of reproductive healthcare infrastructure represents a calculated attack on the rights and lives of the working class, deepening the crisis in maternal and child healthcare in the US.

With the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the capitalist system has proven incapable of supplying hospitals with necessary and basic equipment, like beds and masks, and staff. Instead, the capitalist system, under the Republicans and Democrats, has witnessed unprecedented closures of hospitals due to a lack of funding as well as a rise in healthcare industry-related suicides, brought on by underpaid, understaffed and overworked healthcare workers.

Louisiana ranks 48th among states when it comes to maternal and child care. Moreover, maternal mortality has increased 28 percent in Louisiana since 2016. Louisiana’s maternal mortality rate is higher than the national average of 32.9 percent. From 2018 to 2021, the rate was 39.0 deaths per 100,000 live births, but in 2019, a rate of 58.1 deaths per 100,000 births was recorded, according to a *USA Today* investigation.

The muted response of the Democratic Party to the historic attack on access to abortion makes clear that democratic rights cannot be defended within the framework of the capitalist two-party system.

The attack on abortion rights is apiece with the assault on democratic rights, such as the Biden administration’s recent police crackdown on peaceful protesters opposing Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians, intervention via Congress and the union bureaucracy to isolate, if not outlaw strike action initiated by workers, and their promotion of economic nationalism.

The healthcare industry has suffered greatly under both Republican and Democratic administrations. Ultimately the way forward requires the fight for the alternative to the capitalist system—socialism.



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