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To: Interested Parties

From: NARAL Pro-Choice America Research Team

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Anti-Abortion Republicans Are Gaming the System to Subvert the Will of Voters

Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, anti-abortion extremists in the Republican Party continue to be extraordinarily [out of step](#) with the majority of Americans who support reproductive freedom, including broad segments of their own party. Their [out-of-touch](#) agenda is so [unpopular](#) that they have now resorted to “gaming the system” in order to suppress the will of voters.

The reproductive freedom movement has had [so much success](#) taking the question of abortion access directly to voters, the GOP is now working to change ballot thresholds, confuse voters, call special sessions in state legislatures, and include backdoor abortion bans and restrictions in spending bills. These anti-abortion bad actors are so desperate to maintain power and control that they will do anything they can to impose their regressive agenda on voters. The latest example of this desperation is playing out in Ohio, where anti-abortion extremists and their GOP allies are trying to make it harder for Ohioans to protect abortion access. These bad faith efforts come on the heels of new polling that shows a [majority of Ohioans](#) support reproductive freedom.

Ohio Ballot Initiative & Moving the Goalposts

Advocates for reproductive freedom and abortion access have [secured](#) a November ballot vote where Ohioans could guarantee the right to abortion in the state through an amendment to the state constitution. For over a century, the [requirement](#) in Ohio to amend the state constitution has been a simple majority of voters. Republicans in Ohio are now trying to change that threshold to 60% to preemptively block the abortion access ballot slotted to go to voters in November. This is a [tactic](#) also playing out in other states like Missouri, Florida, North Dakota, and Oklahoma where the GOP is working to make it harder for voters to have a say after a litany of progressive ballot initiatives have passed in states with Republican controlled state legislatures. In total, [fourteen states](#) have proposed fifty measures that would [increase hurdles](#) for ballot measures.

Ahead of the abortion access ballot initiative in November, Ohioans will vote on the Republican-led [Issue 1](#) in August which would amend the state constitution to raise the threshold for ballot initiatives to pass from a simple majority to 60%. For perspective, a [ballot initiative](#) in Ohio in 2022 saw more than 4 million people vote, and under the new threshold it would have required more than 400,000 additional votes to pass. The Issue 1 ballot initiative is a [direct attack](#) on voters' ability to codify abortion rights in Ohio given the [overwhelming popularity](#) of reproductive freedom in the state. The Issue 1 ballot initiative would also increase the requirement for ballots to have signatures from all 88 counties in the state rather than the current requirement of 44. This transparent attempt to [subvert democracy](#) is [nothing new](#) for the



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anti-abortion movement, but is a clear part of their plan to undermine the will of voters in the state when it comes to abortion.

Downplaying the Connection Between Abortion & Issue 1

Despite this obvious maneuvering to prevent voters from enshrining abortion access in the state constitution, proponents of Issue 1 are working to muddy the waters and distract voters from what their efforts are really about

For months those supportive of the Issue 1 ballot have claimed it has nothing to do with abortion, but advocates of the ballot can't seem to keep their stories straight. Republican Secretary of State Frank LaRose initially claimed that Issue 1 was "[a win for good government](#)" that would protect Ohioans from special interests and out of state influence. But LaRose made their ulterior motives plain by later [saying that](#) the Issue 1 vote is "100% about keeping a radical pro-abortion amendment out of our constitution."

Aaron Baer, President of the Ohio based anti-abortion group Center for Christian Virtue, even went on the record detailing their efforts to hide the connection between the two initiatives. Baer said, "When we go up on TV, is the ad going to be on abortion? Probably not," but said they would be "hitting the life issue hard" with conservatives to drum up support. The anti-abortion site and frequent purveyors of misinformation LifeNews even put out a [statement](#) in support of the ballot measure claiming that "Ohio should vote for Issue 1 to help stop abortions up to birth."

Bait and Switch on Parental Rights & Trans Healthcare

Republicans and anti-abortion extremists in the state will clearly [do anything](#) they can to confuse voters ahead of the ballot measure to protect reproductive freedom in November. Conservatives in the state are now attempting to stoke anti-trans sentiment and [trying to tie](#) the vote to broader, and incredibly harmful, parental rights and transgender healthcare culture war debates. Ohio Republicans know reproductive freedom is a winning issue and are working to drum up fear and hatred against the transgender community in order to diminish support for the abortion referendum.

Abortion opponents like Protect Women Ohio are [spending millions](#) on misinformation fueled attack ads claiming the proposed abortion amendment would allow minors to access gender-affirming surgery without parental involvement. These misleading claims aim to further marginalize and demonize an already vulnerable group, and the desperation of these efforts is only overshadowed by their cruelty.

Iowa's Special Session

In addition to changing the rules and sewing confusion around ballot initiatives, anti-abortion extremists and Republican legislators have found other avenues to impose their unpopular abortion bans onto Americans. Iowa's Republican-controlled state legislature recently held a [special session](#) for the express purpose of passing an abortion ban at the direction of



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Republican Governor Kim Reynolds. Reynolds [ordered](#) the session “with the sole purpose of enacting legislation that addresses abortion and protects unborn lives.”

Along partisan lines, the Republican-controlled legislature passed a bill that would ban abortion after six weeks, which is before most people know they are pregnant. Governor Reynolds quickly [signed](#) the bill into law. The push for the six-week abortion ban came just a few weeks after Iowa’s Supreme Court declined to lift a block on the state’s 2018 six-week abortion ban. This extreme Republican power grab comes at a time when the majority of Iowans support abortion access. A recent [poll](#) found that 61% of Iowans believe abortion should be legal in all or most circumstances. The rush to hold a special session to pass an abortion ban is a clear attempt to bypass the will of voters.

Abortion Restrictions Hidden in Spending Bills

Because they can’t win support for their national abortion ban, the Republican-controlled House has recently turned to hijacking essential spending bills for the purpose of banning or restricting access to abortion. The policies being pushed by House Republicans [range](#) from banning the Department of Defense from covering travel costs for reproductive health care to a policy that would reverse the decision that allowed pharmacies to distribute medication abortion via telehealth.

Another Republican provision would block a proposed rule by the Department of Veterans Affairs that would permit the agency’s hospitals to provide abortion care if the life or health of a pregnant veteran was at risk or if the pregnancy was the result of rape or incest. House Republicans have also inserted [restrictions](#) into the Defense, State and Foreign Operations, Homeland Security, and Financial Services and General Government spending bills. These hyperpartisan, back door restrictions threaten the passage of these essential federal spending bills and could lead to a government shutdown.

House Republicans have also [attacked](#) abortion access in the [appropriations bill](#) for the Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services. Their restrictions eliminate funding for the Title X Family Planning Program and the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program, while also working to defund Planned Parenthood. The bill also contains harmful policy riders that seek to block access to abortion, including the discriminatory Hyde Amendment.

These efforts are just the latest example of the GOP and their extreme [anti-abortion allies](#) trying to force their unpopular and cruel agenda onto Americans. These transparent [attempts](#), done in coordination with anti-abortion groups like Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America hold crucial funding hostage and would have devastating consequences on access to reproductive health care, including abortion care.

Cheating to Maintain Power & Control

Whether it's moving the goalposts on citizen-initiated petitions, launching sickening attacks on vulnerable communities, passing bills in the darkness of night or hijacking our federal



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government, it's clear the anti-abortion extremists in Congress and their backers will try anything to enact policies that harm Americans.