

# Building Bridges



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# And Beacons

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## 14 Sex Buyers Arrested, 10 Victims Recovered In Human Trafficking Sting At Comic-Con

Reprinted From The July 31, 2024 USA Today-By Anthony Robledo

Fourteen people were arrested and 10 victims were rescued in a human sex trafficking sting at [San Diego Comic-Con Convention](#).

The San Diego Human Trafficking Task Force conducted a [three-day operation](#) ahead of the weekend bust, California Attorney General Rob Bonta said in a news release on Tuesday, adding that among those rescued was a 16-year-old girl.

"Unfortunately, sex traffickers capitalize on large-scale events such as Comic-Con to exploit their victims for profit," Bonta said in a statement. "These arrests send a clear message to potential offenders that their criminal behavior will not be tolerated."

**Officers worked undercover as**  
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**Sex buyers**

Law enforcement officers went undercover as sex buyers to identify and arrest traffickers, as well as find potential victims, according to the attorney general's officers.

Undercover police also posted ads seeking sex as part of the operation.

The comic book and pop culture event that concluded Sunday takes place at the San Diego Convention Center every summer, drawing over 100,000 people.

"When people use these events as an opportunity to prey upon minors, (Homeland Security Investigations) HSI and our law enforcement partners will find you and bring you before a court of law to face criminal charges," Christopher Davis, acting special agent in charge for HSI San Diego, said in a statement.

"There is no place for alleged predators to operate in our city."

**A Mother Turns Grief Over Her Daughter's Overdose Death Into A Movement To Save Others  
Struggling With Addiction**

Reprinted From CNN, August 2, 2024-By Meg Dunn CNN



Jenna Rae Tatro-Courtesy Tatro family  
Courtesy Tatro family

For so many Americans, Jenna Rae Tatro's story is one that's all too familiar. After a visit to the emergency room in 2012, she received her first prescription for OxyContin.

That 30-day opioid prescription changed the course of her life.

The once joyful 20-year-old who loved horseback riding and animals became addicted to OxyContin. Then she turned to other drugs like heroin and fentanyl. She struggled with addiction for six years and went to 22 rehab facilities and numerous intensive outpatient treatment programs.

"We did everything that we were supposed to do as a family. We did family vacations, we did the Sunday dinners," her mother, Dawn Tatro, said. "But it doesn't matter who you are, because that drug basically owns you."

Tatro remembers her daughter as someone who always wanted to help others. While in rehab, Jenna would often call her mother and ask her to pay for those who couldn't afford to stay. During her final stay at a rehab facility, Jenna told her mom about her future plans.

"She said, 'Mom, when I am ready to leave this sober home, you and I are going to go around and raise funds to help people that aren't as fortunate as I was,'" Tatro said. "And I said, 'That's awesome, because you and I, Jenna, we can do anything.'"

After leaving that facility, Jenna lost her life to a fentanyl overdose on February 15, 2019. She was 26 years old.

**Turning Grief Into Action**

Each year, more than 80,000 people in the US die from an overdose involving opioids.

A few months after their daughter's death, Tatro and her husband, Greg, started [Jenna's Promise](#) in their small town

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of Johnson, Vermont – making Jenna's desire to help others struggling with addiction a reality. Since founding the nonprofit, Tatro and her family have built an innovative program that gives women transitioning out of rehab the time and space to heal and build good habits before returning home. Jenna's Promise provides housing, therapy, workforce development, and a strong community to help women stay sober.

“(After Jenna's passing) I felt like I wanted to die, I didn't want to get out of bed,” Tatro said. “But it forced me to get up and help others, so other families didn't have to struggle with what we were suffering with.”

Dunn/CNN

Tatro learned firsthand about the difficulty of trying to help a loved one get clean. Whether it was the challenge of getting Jenna into treatment, watching her fall back into the same crowd afterward, or being unable to find employment, Tatro saw gaps in the system. Today, Jenna's Promise helps fill in those gaps, creating a safety net.

The residential program has three phases. At first, the women have a lot of supervision and accountability to help them stay on track. As the women grow in the program, they gradually get more independence to prepare themselves to successfully reenter society. Women can stay in the program for six months to one year.

### **Empowering Recovery Through Purpose**

Creating jobs was very important for Tatro, especially after watching Jenna struggle to find her footing.

“She wouldn't have purpose, and she didn't have any work,” Tatro said. “I would try to tell her, ‘You are amazing, you can do anything.’ She would say, ‘People know me in this town, Mom. They're going hire me.’”

So, the Tatros purchased five buildings in town and created businesses that offered jobs for women in the program. First, they work at the appliance store, which sells “scratch and dent” appliances at a 60 percent discount. Jenna's Promise also owns a coffee roasting company, a café, and a general goods store.

All of the businesses are open to the public. For Tatro, a big part of this work is about destigmatizing addiction. By having residents of the community come into the general store or café and interact with the women working there, they're seeing the faces of recovery.

### **Keeping Jenna's Legacy Alive**

Since 2019, dozens of women have gone through Jenna's Promise, setting them up for a successful, sober life.

One of those women, Britain Davignon, was in the program for nearly a year. She struggled with addiction for 20 years and tried going to traditional rehab facilities to get clean.

“Medicaid only pays for 15 days of rehab,” Davignon said. “Fifteen days is not long enough to change your habit.

And then you go right back into the environment that you just left two weeks ago.”

Coming to Jenna's Promise was different. Here, Davignon had what she needed to find her footing and make lasting changes. A big part of that was working at the Jenna's Promise café, where she was promoted to assistant manager.

“Having that job has been so huge for my self-esteem and my confidence,” she said. “I feel like this is who I am supposed to be. I have not missed a day of work since I've been here. And that was not something that I was doing when I was in active use.”

This work has been nonstop for Tatro and her family, who have dedicated their time and a sizeable amount of their retirement savings to the nonprofit. But Tatro says it's all worth it to see these women getting a second chance at life – and to know that Jenna's legacy continues.

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"I always imagine when I see Jenna again that she's going to be waiting up there saying, 'Mom! You did good!'" Tatro said. "I think she'd be really proud of what we created. I'm happy with her promise that we've been upkeeping."

*Want to get involved? Check out [the Jenna's Promise website](#) and see how to help.*

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## Freed American Says She's 'Finally Being Treated as A Human Being' After Russian Detention

Reprinted From CNN-August 5, 2024-By Kaylee GreenleeBeal/Reuters



Alsu Kurmasheva

Russian-American journalist [Alsu Kurmasheva](#) said she's "finally being treated as a human being" following her release from Russian detention in a historic prisoner exchange between Washington and the Kremlin last week.

"I've been waking up from that nightmare," Kurmasheva told CNN's Jake Tapper on "The Lead" in her first television interview since her release. "I had a feeling I fell asleep 10 months ago, and now I'm getting out of it."

Kurmasheva and fellow freed Americans [Evan Gershkovich](#) and [Paul Whelan](#) were reunited with their families in an emotional scene at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland last week. Kurmasheva rushed into the arms of her husband and daughters on the tarmac after greeting Vice President Kamala Harris and President Joe Biden.

The US-backed Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist had been detained in October 2023 and found guilty of spreading false information about the Russian army – charges her family and employer deny.

Kurmasheva and her husband, Pavel Butorin, have two daughters, including one who [turned 13](#) just minutes after reuniting with her mother.

Asked by Tapper what it was like to learn she would be released, Kurmasheva said she didn't believe she was free until "the very end."

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“It wasn’t until I saw my family that I believed that I’m free. Or, I would say when I was on a US airplane that I really believed that something like magic I was hoping for months was happening,” she continued.

Pavel recounted similar uncertainty in the hours leading up to his wife’s homecoming.

“Many things came as a surprise on that day, even that phone call from the president’s office,” Pavel said. “It came as a total surprise, and we were so happy to hear Alsu’s voice finally after so many months of no communication with her.”

### **‘There Is Always Hope’**

Recounting her release, Kurmasheva said she wasn’t told where she was being taken when removed from her prison cell in the Russian city of Kazan.

Aboard a bus in Moscow, Kurmasheva said, “I didn’t know what was going on.”

“Then I saw that bus of other prisoners — even then, you can never know for 100% that it’s going to happen,” she added. “So, there was hope, as there is a belief that there is always hope, but you should be ready for anything.”

Kurmasheva said that while aboard the bus she recognized Gershkovich, the Wall Street Journal reporter wrongfully detained by Russian authorities on espionage charges, though the two weren’t allowed to speak.

“We just greeted each other, and we recognized each other,” Kurmasheva said. “We haven’t met, but we knew each other by the photos. And the first time we talked, it was on the US plane where we took off from Ankara.”

Kurmasheva is not the only RFE/RL reporter who has been held in Russian captivity. [Vladyslav Yesypenko](#), a journalist for the outlet’s Ukrainian Service, was detained in Russia-occupied Crimea on March 10, 2021; [Ihar Losik](#), a journalist for the publication’s Belarus Service, was detained in Minsk on June 25, 2020; and [Andrey Kuznechik](#), also from the Belarus Service, was detained in Minsk on November 25, 2021.

“Their nightmare will be over at some point because no family should have to go through this nightmare, especially journalists,” Pavel said of Kurmasheva’s imprisoned colleagues.

“Journalism is not a crime. They’ve done nothing wrong, we know that,” he added. “Alsu is not a criminal, she’s done nothing wrong, the world knows she is not a criminal, and we’ll get them out, we’ll get her colleagues out.”

### **Hostage Affairs Official: Biden Admin Has Made ‘Hard Decisions’**

The sweeping deal [involved 24 detainees](#) in total and was the result of years of complicated behind-the-scenes negotiations involving the US, Russia, Belarus and Germany, ultimately leading Berlin to agree to Moscow’s key demand – releasing convicted [Russian assassin Vadim Krasikov](#).

The top US hostage affairs official addressed criticism that Russia may be more likely to take US hostages for leverage if the White House continues to approve prisoner swaps, telling Tapper earlier in the program that the Biden administration had to assume some risk in order to bring the Americans hostages home.

“You always assume a risk in these situations, and the president has been willing to make these hard decisions,” Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs Roger Carstens said.

Carstens, who was also involved in the high-profile releases of [former Marine Trevor Reed](#) and [WNBA star Brittney Griner](#) from Russian detention, has served as the US’ top hostage negotiator since 2020. The diplomat told Tapper that he once had 54 hostage cases that are “now down to just over 20.”

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“So we’ve made hard changes. We’ve traded some bad people to get good people, innocent people back,” Carstens. Said.

“And you would think that my numbers would be skyrocketing up and yet they’re not. They’re going in the opposite direction. So the math proves that assertion to be wrong,” he continued. “When we make these hard decisions and the president makes the tough call to send someone back in a trade like this, our numbers are actually going down.”

Sen. Lindsey Graham suggested on Fox News on Sunday that the deal has increased Putin’s leverage on the West, saying there is a “cycle” that incentivizes the Kremlin to detain Americans on “trumped up charges” so they can exchange them for “Russian spies and killers.” The South Carolina Republican said that the “cycle needs to stop.”

Asked Monday whether President Joe Biden plans to contact the family of Marc Fogel, a US teacher in Russian prison who was [not included in the swap](#), Carstens said that he can’t speak for Biden and has called on the Russians to release Fogel on humanitarian grounds.

Though Fogel [has not been designated as “wrongfully detained”](#) by the Biden administration, the US has brought back people that have not had the designation before, Carstens explained.

“Just because someone’s not necessarily designated wrongful doesn’t mean that we’re not also trying to work behind the scenes to bring them home as well,” he said.

*This headline and story have been updated with additional developments.*

CNN’s Jennifer Hansler contributed to this report.

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**Father Lost His Son To Sextortion Swindlers. He Helped The FBI Find The Suspects**

Reprinted From The Augst 8, 2024 USA TODAY-By Krystal Nurse

A Pennsylvania father stricken by grief after his son's suicide helped the FBI locate and extradite two people from another continent on charges that they sexually extorted his son.

[Sextortion is a fast-burgeoning crime problem](#) in America and across the globe, [resulting in over 20 suicides in the U.S. since 2021](#).

The typical scenario involves online swindlers lurking on social media, pretending to be attractive women and enticing young men to send nude or suggestive photographs. Once the charlatans have the photo, they use it to blackmail the victim by threatening to post the embarrassing image on Facebook or show it to the duped person's loved ones.

Federal agents and U.S. District Court documents say that's exactly what happened to an unsuspecting young man in Pennsylvania in 2023. An FBI affidavit says Imoleayo Samuel Aina and Samuel Olasunkanmi Abiodun, both of Nigeria, posed as a young girl and beguiled the man to send sexually explicit images of himself.

Aina and Abiodun threatened to publicize the photos unless he sent them \$1,000, the [U.S. Attorney's Office of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania](#) said in a statement. The [FBI called the scheme financially motivated sextortion](#).

USA TODAY is not naming the deceased man or his father out of respect for their privacy.

Court records show Aina and Abiodun were arrested by Nigerian authorities on Sept. 14 and Sept. 3, respectively.

They were extradited to the U.S. on July 31. Aina faces U.S. charges of cyberstalking, interstate threat to injure reputation, and receiving proceeds of extortion; Abiodun is charged with wire fraud and money laundering

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In January, families packed a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing sharing stories of their children who died by suicide over social media.

conspiracy.

If convicted, Aina faces a maximum life sentence and Abiodun faces a maximum of 40 years in prison [Roberta O'Malley](#), assistant professor of criminology at the University of South Florida, told USA TODAY that in her [research of 215 men who were sexually extorted](#), half told her they had thoughts of death or suicide. She alluded to that coming from feelings of guilt or shame for being targeted, which trickled down to many declining law enforcement involvement and to social withdrawal.

"Those individuals who experienced suicidal ideation as a byproduct of financial sextortion were also the people who either reported feeling a lot of shame and guilt or having these really negative somatic symptoms as well," O'Malley said.

A small card was handed out to teens by Tamia Woods informing them about how to seek help from sextortion. The FBI said victims are typically teens who also experience suicidal ideations as victims.

**Father Uses Son's Phone To Help FBI Locate Suspects**

After the man's death, his father accessed his son's iPhone and read notifications from an email and social media accounts used by Aina and Abiodun for the scheme, according to court documents.

FBI Special Agent Jennifer Zenszer said the two Nigerian men had sent a text to the victim threatening to publicize

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sexual images of him if he didn't reply and send cash.

"The extortion scheme that targeted (the victim) is consistent with a trend of foreign-based organized groups targeting victims in the United States in various sextortion schemes," she wrote.

She added the schemes involved playing as a young attractive woman [typically to young men](#) to get sexually explicit photos, then [threatening to post them online](#) unless the victim pays money through third-party banking apps or cryptocurrency - all of which happened in the Pennsylvania case.

The FBI obtained several subpoenas and warrants to link Aina to email and WhatsApp accounts used to contact the victim. Abiodun owned the Snapchat, bank and Bitcoin accounts, according to court papers.

The victim's dad and an undercover FBI employee helped get information from the two Nigerians by posing as a teen and the victim, according to the federal affidavit.

A third man, Afeez Olatunji Adewale, was interviewed by the FBI where he told agents about the cybercrime scheme, called "Yahoo" in Nigeria, and people involved are "Yahoo Boys."

In January, families packed a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing sharing stories of their children who died by suicide over social media.

Zenszer wrote Adewale told agents he knows Abiodun does other fraud activities and is involved in a large range of "Yahoo" because of his screenshots of money coming from different vendors. Adewale admitted he was sending and receiving money from December 2022 to January 2023 on Abiodun's behalf.

"When asked by interviewing agents if Adewale considers Abiodun a 'Yahoo Boy,' Adewale answered, 'Hell ya,'" Zenszer wrote.

The two called the victim eight times and received \$1,000 from the victim just before his suicide. Abiodun and Aina were interviewed by the FBI and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission law enforcement agency in Nigeria, where they allegedly confessed to agents about receiving money and using financially motivated sextortion.

Law enforcement involvement is rare in such cases. O'Malley said 20% of the victims she spoke to didn't report it to police because of feelings of shame and doubt if police would fully investigate the crime.

"There's this other element of self-blame where they really just don't want to report, and they feel very self-conscious doing so," she said.

**Changes Are Coming To Help Survivors Of Sextortion**

Sextortion is a federal crime and some [states are stepping up to pass laws](#) banning nonconsensual distribution of sexual photos, commonly referred as revenge porn, O'Malley said. The [Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing in January](#) with leaders of social media companies to pressure them to act and prevent children from being exploited on their platforms.

It's one of many ways she said society is starting to more strongly address sextortion. [Support groups are growing](#), she said.

"I think people becoming more aware of this kind of crime is always going to kind of reduce stigma in terms of those who've been victimized," she said.

With many of the perpetrators of sextortion located outside of the U.S., O'Malley said an arrest isn't likely to happen.

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But with advancements in technology and the Justice Department taking a strong interest in investigating the crimes, more tools are available to help victims at least attempt to remove sextorted images.

The FBI has requested that anyone or their loved ones are involved in sextortion, to call the department at 1-800-225-5324 or report it online at [Tips.FBI.gov](https://tips.fbi.gov).

"If they can prevent the spread of their images by using kind of more of these technological solutions, such as [NCMEC Take it Down initiative](#), that can really relieve a lot of anxiety for victims, because that's really the thing that they're most concerned about, is their image living online," O'Malley said.

*If you or someone you know is or could be a victim of online sexual violence, including sextortion, organizations like the National Sexual Violence Resource Center are here to help survivors and their loved ones. Visit [NSVRC.org](https://www.nsvrc.org) for help and support.*

*If you or someone you know needs mental health resources and support, please call, text, or chat with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or visit [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org) for 24/7 access to free and confidential services.*

*Contact reporter Krystal Nurse at [knurse@USATODAY.com](mailto:knurse@USATODAY.com). Follow her on X, formerly Twitter, [@KrystalRNurse](https://twitter.com/KrystalRNurse).*

*This article originally appeared on USA TODAY: [Sextortion drove his son to suicide. He helped FBI find the suspects](#)*

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## **Olympic Disqualification Of Gold Medal Hopeful Exposes 'Dark Side' Of Women's Wrestling** Reprinted From USA TODAY-By Tom Schad



Vinesh Phogat

PARIS — A female wrestler from India was disqualified from her gold-medal bout at the [Paris Olympics](#) on Wednesday morning after weighing in about 100 grams above the maximum limit for her weight class.

For context: That's about 0.22 pounds or 3.5 ounces – roughly the weight of a bar of soap.

The shocking news not only knocked Vinesh Phogat out of the 50-kilogram Olympic final against American Sarah Hildebrandt, where she would've been guaranteed to win no worse than a silver medal. Under international wrestling rules, Phogat's failure to make weight resulted in a full disqualification. She technically finished dead last.

U.S. wrestling icon Jordan Burroughs, who is on the call for NBC in Paris, [described the situation on Twitter](#) as "tragic."

"She has looked amazing this week, and deserved to be on that podium," Burroughs wrote.

The Indian Olympic Association's chief medical officer, Dinshaw Pardiwala, [said in a statement](#) that Phogat used "all possible drastic measures" to lose weight during a sleepless night – including spending time in a sauna, restricting fluids and even cutting off her hair. She was the first Indian wrestler to reach an Olympic final, and her gold or silver would've been the best finish for an Indian athlete at the Paris Games to date.

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Hildebrandt instead faced Yusneyls Guzmán in the final [and defeated the Cuban wrestler, 3-0, to win gold.](#)

"I was preparing for chaos, but that was not on my bingo card of chaos," Hildebrandt said of Phogat failing to make weight.

Phogat's sudden disqualification sent shockwaves across the wrestling world and particularly in India, where high-ranking sports and political officials, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have weighed in publicly on the story.

But it also cast a bright spotlight on what recently crowned Olympic gold medalist Amit Elor described to USA TODAY Sports earlier this year as "the dark side of the sport," particularly in women's wrestling: Cutting weight.

"It's something that a lot of times, if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, it can be really promoted and it's very unnecessary – especially from a young age," said Elor, [who won gold at 68 kilograms on Tuesday night.](#)

"For women, I think weight cutting is very unhealthy and not recommended. Not only physically but mentally, I think it can ruin your relationship with the sport. It makes it less about wrestling and more about sweating and dieting and feeling hungry and tired and weak – and those things are unnecessary, especially when you're just starting out."

While weight management is an intrinsic part of wrestling across genders, it can pose a particular challenge for women, who are both more likely to develop eating disorders and more likely to experience body image dissatisfaction issues than men, according [to statistics curated by the National Eating Disorders Association.](#)

Elor, 20, said she is thankful that her parents did not let her cut weight when she was first getting started in wrestling. At the elite and professional levels of the sport, however, it is commonplace.

"At the end of the day, (cutting weight) is definitely part of the job and we all got to get it done, as (expletive) as it is," Hildebrandt said. "I make sure my weight cut's in line, and it's something I invest a lot of time in."

At Champ-de-Mars Arena in Paris this week, any wrestler who gets into the mix for a medal winds up competing over parts of two days. They are required to weigh in early each morning to ensure they are below the maximum allowable weight in their division, but they can then eat and drink between the two weigh-ins to recover their energy.

Lucia Yamileth Yopez Guzman (ECU) celebrates after defeating Annika Wendle (GER) in a women's freestyle 53kg semifinal during the Paris 2024 Olympic Summer Games at Champ-de-Mars Arena on Aug. 7, 2024.

For Phogat, that schedule led to a frantic and perhaps dangerous rollercoaster of weight gains and losses over a span of 24 hours, according to information released by Indian Olympic officials and reported by Indian news outlets. According to news reports, she comfortably made weight Tuesday morning but then gained about 2.7 kilograms – or roughly 6 pounds – over the course of the day while rehydrating and refueling after three bouts.

Pardiwala, the Team India medical officer, said that Phogat's nutritionist had anticipated she would gain only about half that amount. The team soon realized that their normal weight-cutting measures – such as "a calculated restriction of food and water" and "sweating from exercises and sauna" – would not work. After a reportedly sleepless night, they resorted to cutting her hair. But to no avail.

After not making weight, Team India said, Phogat was hospitalized for possible dehydration and had blood tests performed. She "feels perfectly well" but is disappointed, the Indian Olympic Association added Wednesday.

"After three tough matches against world class opponents, no athlete should have to spend the night preparing for a gold medal in this manner," Burroughs [wrote in another tweet](#), before later lobbying for Olympic organizers to give Phogat a silver medal.

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Phogat took to social media following the ordeal, announcing her retirement from the sport, per Reuters.

"Wrestling won and I lost. My dreams are shattered. I don't have any more strength," [Phogat wrote on X](#).

"Goodbye wrestling 2001-2024. I will always be indebted to you all. I am sorry."

Phogat is one of the many wrestlers in Paris who had to switch out of their usual weight class to compete at the Paris Olympics, where only six weight classes are offered in women's wrestling rather than the usual 10 that are contested at world championships. The men have six weights each in freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling.

No matter the number of weight classes, however, the same issue will remain.

"It is true that weight is a very important factor in this sport," said Guzmán, who took Phogat's place in the final. "In fact, this is the first opponent we have."

**Contact Tom Schad at [tschad@usatoday.com](mailto:tschad@usatoday.com) or on social media [@Tom\\_Schad](#).**

*This article originally appeared on USA TODAY: [Olympic disqualification of gold medal hopeful exposes 'dark side' of women's wrestling](#)*

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## **Dozens Of Pregnant Women, Some Bleeding Or In Labor, Being Turned Away From ERs Despite Federal Law**

Reprinted From The AP, August 12, 2024-By Amanda Seitz



Kyleigh Thurman, one of the patients who is filing a federal complaint against an emergency room for not treating her ectopic pregnancy, talks about her experience at her studio, Wednesday, Aug. 7, 2024, in Burnet County, Texas. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bleeding and in pain, Kyleigh Thurman didn't know her doomed pregnancy could kill her.

Emergency room doctors at Ascension Seton Williamson in Texas handed her a pamphlet on miscarriage and told her to "let nature take its course" before discharging her without treatment for her ectopic pregnancy.

When the 25-year-old returned three days later, still bleeding, doctors finally agreed to give her an injection intended to end the pregnancy. But it was too late. The fertilized egg growing on Thurman's fallopian tube would rupture it, destroying part of her reproductive system.

That's according to a [complaint Thurman and the Center for Reproductive Rights](#) filed last week asking the

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## **Dozens Of Pregnant Women, Some Bleeding Or In Labor, Being Turned Away From ERs**

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government to investigate whether the hospital violated a federal law when staff failed to treat her initially in February 2023.

"I was left to flail," Thurman said. "It was nothing short of being misled."

Even as the Biden administration publicly warned hospitals to treat pregnant patients in emergencies, facilities continue to violate the federal law. The issue became a focus for the administration following reports of women being improperly treated in emergency rooms after the Supreme Court's decision to overturn the constitutional right to an abortion more than two years ago.

More than 100 pregnant women in medical distress who sought help from emergency rooms were turned away or negligently treated since 2022, an Associated Press analysis of federal hospital investigations has found.

Two women – one in Florida and [one in Texas](#) – were left to miscarry in public restrooms. In Arkansas, a woman went into septic shock and her fetus died after an emergency room sent her home. At least four other women with ectopic pregnancies had trouble getting any treatment, including one California woman who needed a blood transfusion after she sat for nine hours in an emergency waiting room.

The White House says hospitals must offer abortions when needed to save a woman's health, despite state bans.

Texas is challenging that guidance and, earlier this summer, the Supreme Court [declined](#) to resolve the issue.

Abortion bans complicate risky pregnancy care.

In Texas, where doctors face up to 99 years of prison if convicted of performing an illegal abortion, medical and legal experts say the law is complicating decision-making around emergency pregnancy care.

Although the state law says termination of ectopic pregnancies is not considered abortion, the draconian penalties scare Texas doctors from treating those patients, the Center for Reproductive Rights argues.

"As fearful as hospitals and doctors are of running afoul of these state abortion bans, they also need to be concerned about running afoul of federal law," said Marc Hearn, a center attorney. Hospitals face a federal investigation, hefty penalties and threats to their Medicare funding if they break the federal law.

The organization filed two complaints last week with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Service alleging that different Texas emergency rooms failed to treat two patients, including Thurman, with ectopic pregnancies.

Another [complaint](#) says Kelsie Norris-De La Cruz, 25, lost a fallopian tube and most of an ovary after an Arlington, Texas, hospital sent her home without treating her ectopic pregnancy, even after a doctor said discharge was "not in her best interest."

"The doctors knew I needed an abortion, but these bans are making it nearly impossible to get basic emergency healthcare," she said in a statement. "I'm filing this complaint because women like me deserve justice and accountability from those that hurt us."

Conclusively diagnosing an ectopic pregnancy can be difficult. Doctors cannot always find the pregnancy's location on an ultrasound, three separate doctors consulted for this article explained. Hormone levels, bleeding, a positive pregnancy test and ultrasound of an empty uterus all indicate an ectopic pregnancy.

"You can't be 100% — that's the tricky part," said Kate Arnold, an OB-GYN in Washington. "They're literally time bombs. It's a pregnancy growing in this thing that can only grow so much."

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**Dozens Of Pregnant Women, Some Bleeding Or In Labor, Being Turned Away From ERs**

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Texas Right to Life Director John Seago said the state law clearly protects doctors from prosecution if they terminate ectopic pregnancies, even if a doctor “makes a mistake” in diagnosing it.

“Sending a woman back home is completely unnecessary, completely dangerous,” Seago said.

But the state law has “absolutely” made doctors afraid of treating pregnant patients, said Hannah Gordon, an emergency medicine physician who worked in a Dallas hospital until last year.

“It’s going to force doctors to start creating questionable scenarios for patients, even if it’s very dangerous,” said Gordon. She left Texas hoping to become pregnant and worried about the care she’d get there.

Gordon recalled a pregnant patient at her Dallas emergency room who had signs of an ectopic pregnancy. Because OB-GYNs said they couldn't definitively diagnose the problem, they waited to end the pregnancy until she came back the next day.

“It left a bad taste in my mouth,” Gordon said.

In Thurman's case, when she returned to Ascension Seton Williamson a third time, her OB-GYN told her she'd need surgery to remove the fallopian tube, which had ruptured. Thurman, still heavily bleeding, balked. Losing the tube would jeopardize her fertility.

But her doctor told her she risked death if she waited any longer.

“She came in and she’s like, you're either going to have to have a blood transfusion, or you’re going to have to have surgery or you’re going to bleed out,” Thurman said, through tears. “That’s when I just kind of was like, “oh my God, I’m, I’m dying.”

Ascension Seton Williamson declined to comment on Thurman’s case, but said in a statement the hospital “is committed to providing high-quality care to all who seek our services.”

In Florida, a 15-week pregnant woman leaked amniotic fluid for an hour in Broward Health Coral Springs' emergency wait room, according to federal documents. An ultrasound revealed the patient had no amniotic fluid surrounding the fetus, a dangerous situation that can cause serious infection.

The woman miscarried in a public bathroom that day, after the emergency room doctor listed her condition as “improved” and discharged her, without consulting the hospital's OB-GYN.

Emergency crews rushed her to another hospital, where she was placed on a ventilator and discharged after six days.

Abortions after 15 weeks were banned in Florida at the time. Broward Health Coral Springs' obstetrics medical director told an investigator that inducing labor for anyone who presents with pre-viable premature rupture of membranes is "the standard of care, has been a while, regardless of heartbeat, due to the risk to the mother.”

The hospital declined to comment or share its policies with the AP.

In another Florida case, a doctor admitted state law had complicated emergency pregnancy care.

“Because of the new laws ... staff cannot intervene unless there is a danger to the patient's health,” a doctor at Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood, Florida, told an investigator who was probing the hospital's failure to offer an abortion to a pregnant woman whose water broke at 15 weeks, well before the fetus could survive.

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**Dozens Of Pregnant Women, Some Bleeding Or In Labor, Being Turned Away From ERs**

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Troubles extend beyond abortion ban states

Serious violations that jeopardized a mother or her fetus' health occurred in states with and without abortion bans, the AP's review found.

In interviews with investigators, two short-staffed hospitals – in Idaho and Washington – admitted to routinely directing pregnant patients to drive to other hospitals.

A pregnant patient at a Bakersfield, California, emergency room was quickly triaged, but staff failed to realize the urgency of her condition, a uterine rupture. The delay, an investigator concluded, may have contributed to the baby's death.

Doctors at emergency rooms in California, Nebraska, Arkansas and South Carolina failed to check for fetal heartbeats or discharged patients who were in active labor, leaving them to deliver at home or in ambulances, according to the documents.

Nursing and doctor shortages that have plagued hospitals since the onset of COVID-19, trouble staffing ultrasounds around-the-clock, and new abortion laws are making the emergency room a dangerous place for pregnant women, warned Dara Kass, an emergency medicine doctor and former U.S. Health and Human Services official.

“It is increasingly less safe to be pregnant and seeking emergency care in an emergency department,” she said.

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**Dates To Remember**

**September**

Sept. 2nd: Labor Day  
Sept. 8th: Grandparent's Day  
Sept. 11th: Patriot's Day

**October**

Oct.2nd: Rosh Hashanah begins at sundown  
Oct. 11th: Yom Kippur begins at sundown  
Oct.14th: Columbus Day  
Oct.14th:Indigenous Day  
Oct.31st: Halloween

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**Birthdays**

**September**

None

**October**

Oct. 2nd: Mal Weinberg  
Oct. 7th: Dave Palughi  
Oct. 19th: Mary Alice Cunningham

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