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Police Are Questioning Florida Voters About Signing An Abortion Rights Ballot Petition

Reprinted From The
September 9, 2024 AP-By Kate
Payne

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — State police are showing up at Florida voters' homes to question them about signing a petition to get an [abortion rights amendment](#) on the ballot in November, and a state health care agency has launched a website targeting the ballot initiative with politically charged language.

Critics say they're the latest efforts by Florida's Republican elected officials to leverage state resources to try to block the abortion rights measure, moves which some Democratic officials argue could violate state laws against voter intimidation.

"Ron (DeSantis) has repeatedly used state power to interfere with a citizen-led process to get reproductive freedom on the ballot," Florida Democratic Party Chair Nikki Fried told reporters

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on Monday. "This is their latest desperate attempt before Election Day."

The ballot initiative known as Amendment 4 would enshrine abortion rights in Florida law. If approved by 60% of voters, the procedure would remain legal until the fetus is viable, as determined by the patient's health care provider.

Isaac Menasche, one of [nearly a million people](#) who signed the petition to get the measure on the ballot, said a law enforcement officer knocked on his door last week in Lee County in southwest Florida to ask him about signing it.

The officer said the questioning was part of an investigation into alleged petition fraud, the [Tampa Bay Times](#) reported.

"I'm not a person who is going out there protesting for abortion," Menasche told the newspaper. "I just felt strongly, and I took the opportunity when "The person asked me to say,

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People listen as President Joe Biden speaks about reproductive freedom on April 23, 2024, at Hillsborough Community College in Tampa, Fla. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta, file)

ASSOCIATED PRESS



Dave Behrle, 70, of Safety Harbor holds a sign while standing outside the All Women's Health Center of Clearwater on May 3, 2022. (Chris Urso/Tampa Bay Times via AP, file)

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“Yeah, I’ll sign that petition.”

Critics say the investigation is a brazen attempt to intimidate voters in the country’s third-largest state from protecting access to abortion — and the latest in a series of efforts by the governor’s administration to target Amendment 4.

“Amendment 4 was placed on the ballot by nearly one million Floridians around the state and across party lines who believe that people, not politicians, deserve the freedom to make their own health care decisions,” Lauren Brenzel, the director of the Yes on 4 campaign, said in an email. “But the State will stop at nothing to keep in place their near-total abortion ban.”

Florida law currently bans most abortions after [six weeks](#) of pregnancy, before many women even know they are pregnant.

Speaking at a press event Monday in South Florida, DeSantis defended police visiting the homes of petition signers, and a separate move by a state health care agency to create a website targeting the ballot amendment, saying both are aimed at making sure November’s vote is fair.

DeSantis signed a law in 2022 creating a [state police force](#) dedicated to investigating voter fraud and elections crimes. [Voter fraud is rare](#), typically occurs in isolated instances and is generally detected.

He said elections police are going to the homes of people who signed the petitions that got Amendment 4 on the ballot not to intimidate them, but because questions have been raised about the legitimacy of the signatures. He said the police have found evidence that some of the supposed signatures were from dead people.

“Anyone who submitted a petition that is a valid voter, that is totally within their rights to do it,” DeSantis said. “We are not investigating that. What they are investigating is fraudulent petitions. We know that this group did submit on behalf of dead people.”

A deadline in [state law](#) to challenge the validity of the signatures has long passed, but county-level election administrators across Florida say they have been receiving requests from state officials to turn over verified petition signatures as part of a state probe.

Mary Jane Arrington, a Democrat who has served as the Supervisor of Elections in Osceola County in central Florida for 16 years, told The Associated Press she had never received a request like this one before.

Arrington said she didn’t know what to make of the state’s request to review signatures her office had already verified.

“These are ones that we deemed the petition valid, both in completeness and in their signature matching what we had on file for the voter,” Arrington said. “They said they were investigating ... signature petition fraud.”

The state’s elections crime unit has opened more than 40 investigations into paid petition gathers working for the Amendment 4 campaign, according to a letter that Deputy Secretary of State Brad McVay sent to the Palm Beach County supervisor of elections that was shared with the AP.

[Judges have tossed out](#) previous criminal cases brought by the controversial Office of Election Crimes and Security.

Meanwhile, a state health care agency launched a new website last week targeting Amendment 4, with a landing page proclaiming that “Florida is Protecting Life” and warning “Don’t let the fearmongers lie to you.”

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DeSantis said the page created by Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration is being paid through a budget the department has to do with public service announcements. He said the page is not political but is giving Floridians "factual information" about the amendment.

"Everything that is put out is factual. It is not electioneering," DeSantis said at the news conference, adding, "I am glad they are doing it."

Florida is one of nine states where measures to protect abortion access have qualified to go before voters in 2024.

Florida Republicans have been using various other strategies to thwart the state abortion ballot measure. Republican Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody attempted to use [the state Supreme Court](#) to keep abortion off the ballot.

Later, abortion rights advocates criticized a financial impact statement meant to be placed on the ballot beside the proposed amendment as an attempt to mislead voters. The state Supreme Court ruled in August to allow the language to remain on the ballot.

Meanwhile, anti-abortion groups and GOP allies across the country are using an [array of strategies](#) to counter proposed ballot initiatives aiming to protect reproductive rights. [These tactics](#) have included legislative pushes for competing ballot measures that could confuse voters and monthslong delays caused by lawsuits over ballot initiative language.

Nebraskans, for example, are awaiting rulings from the state Supreme Court on three lawsuits aimed at keeping abortion off the ballot. And the Missouri Supreme Court is set to hear arguments Tuesday in an appeal of a lower court ruling that an abortion rights campaign did not meet legal requirements to qualify for the November ballot.

Associated Press writers Christine Fernando in Chicago, Geoff Mulvihill in Philadelphia, and Terry Spencer in Fort Lauderdale contributed to this report.

Kate Payne is a corps member for The Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. [Report for America](#) is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Missouri Supreme Court Rules Abortion Rights Measure Will Be On State Ballot

Reprinted From Reuters, September 10, 2024-By Gabriella Borter

(Reuters) -Missouri's top court on Tuesday ruled that a proposed abortion rights amendment to the state constitution will appear on the ballot in November, allowing voters to decide whether to restore legal abortion in Missouri for the first time in over two years.

The measure, which proposes a right to abortion in Missouri until fetal viability, will likely appear on the November ballot for voters after organizers submitted more than 250,000 petition signatures and the secretary of state's office verified them last month.

"Today's Missouri Supreme Court decision is a victory for both direct democracy and reproductive freedom in Missouri," Missourians for Constitutional Freedom wrote on X, the group sponsoring the measure.

The decision came after a lawsuit filed by anti-abortion lawmakers and advocates, where a circuit court judge on Friday ruled that the measure should not have qualified for the ballot because it did not sufficiently explain the ramifications that its passage would have.

Missourians for Constitutional Freedom appealed the ruling over the weekend, and the state Supreme Court's Tuesday decision reversed the lower court's order.

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"It is deeply unfortunate the court decided to ignore laws that protect voters in order to satisfy pro-abortion activists who intentionally omitted critical information from the initiative petition," Mary Catherine Martin, an attorney for the group challenging the measure's validity, said in a statement.

The decision came just hours before the deadline for Missouri's ballot printing. On Tuesday morning, the court heard arguments from the representatives for the respondents - including Republican state senator Mary Elizabeth Coleman - and for the appellants.

Missouri's secretary of state John Ashcroft "shall certify to local election authorities that Amendment 3 be placed on the November 5, 2024, general election ballot and shall take all steps necessary to ensure that it is on said ballot,"

Chief Justice Mary Russell wrote in the ruling notice.

Missouri is currently enforcing a total abortion ban with exceptions for medical emergencies. The ballot measure's proposal to enshrine the right to abortion until fetal viability - typically around 24 weeks in pregnancy - drew support from 52% of Missouri voters in a St. Louis University/YouGov poll conducted from Aug. 9-16. The measure would need more than 50% support to pass.

The issue of abortion is now set to appear on ballots in nine states this November, including Missouri and a few battleground states likely to play critical roles in the presidential race and the fight for control of Congress. (Reporting by Gabriella Borter; Editing by Leslie Adler and Aurora Ellis)

Arizona's 1864 Abortion Ban Is Officially Off The Books **Reprinted From The September 14, 2024 New York Post-By Jacki Thrapp**

Arizona's Civil War-era ban on nearly all abortions was officially repealed on Saturday.

The western swing state has been whipsawed over recent months, starting with the Arizona Supreme Court deciding in April to let the state enforce the long-dormant 1864 law that criminalized all abortions except when a woman's life was jeopardized. Then state lawmakers voted on a bill to repeal that law once and for all.

Democratic Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs [signed the bill](#) in May, declaring it was just the beginning of a fight to protect reproductive health care in Arizona.

"I will continue doing everything in my power to protect reproductive freedoms, because I trust women to make the decisions that are best for them, and know politicians do not belong in the doctor's office," Hobbs said in a statement.

Abortion has sharply defined Arizona's political arena since the US Supreme Court [overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022](#). As the November general election approaches, the issue remains a focus of Democratic campaigns, and it will be up to Arizona voters to decide whether to enshrine the right to abortion in the state constitution.

The Road To Repeal

It was after the state Supreme Court cleared the way for enforcement that Hobbs urged the state Legislature to take imminent action to undo the ban before it went into effect. Republican lawmakers, who hold a narrow majority in both chambers, derailed discussions about repealing the ban. At one point, the roadblocks resulted in chants of "Shame! Shame!" by outraged Democratic colleagues.

Emotions on the House floor and in the gallery ran high as House Democrats were able to garner the support of three Republicans to pass the repeal legislation two weeks later, sending the measure to the Senate for consideration. Two GOP senators joined with Democrats a week later to grant final approval.

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Arizona's 1864 Abortion Ban Is Officially Off The Books

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Democratic Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs signed a bill to repeal the Civil War-era ban on nearly all abortions in early May.

AP

Democrats were advocating for the repeal long before the Supreme Court issued its ruling. Even Hobbs called for action in her January State of the State address.

The battle in Arizona made national headlines again when Democratic state Sen. Eva Burch told fellow lawmakers in a floor speech in March that she was going to get an abortion because her pregnancy was no longer viable. She said in an interview that it was her chance to highlight that the laws passed by legislators in Arizona “actually do impact people in practice and not just in theory.”

Current Law

In the weeks between the high court’s decision and Hobbs signing the repeal into law, Arizonans were in a state of confusion about whether the near-total ban would end up taking effect before the repeal was implemented.

A court order put the ban on hold, but questions lingered about whether doctors in the state could perform the procedure. California Gov. Gavin Newsom weighed in on the issue in late May, signing legislation allowing Arizona doctors to receive temporary, emergency licenses to perform abortions in California.

With the territorial ban no longer in play, Arizona law allows abortions until 15 weeks. After that, there is an exception to save the life of the mother, but missing are exceptions for cases of rape or incest after the 15-week mark.

Arizona requires those seeking an abortion prior to the 15-week mark to have an ultrasound at least 24 hours before the procedure and to be given the opportunity to view it. Minors must have either parental consent or authorization

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from a state judge, except in cases of incest or when their life is at risk.

Abortion medication can only be provided through a qualified physician, and only licensed physicians can perform surgical abortions. Abortion providers and clinics also must record and report certain information about the abortions they perform to the department of health services.

Voters Will Decide

Voters will have the ultimate say on whether to add the right to an abortion to the state constitution when they cast their ballots in the general election.

Arizona for Abortion Access, the coalition leading the ballot measure campaign, was successful in securing the measure's spot on the ballot. The Arizona Secretary of State verified 577,971 signatures that were collected as part of the citizen-led campaign, well over the 383,923 required from registered voters.

If voters approve the measure, abortions would be allowed until fetal viability — the point at which a fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks. It also would allow abortions after that time in cases where the mother's physical or mental health is in jeopardy.

Staten Island Honors Student Becomes Licensed Pilot, Makes History At Age 17

Reprinted From March 21, 2024 SiLive.com

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — A Staten Island high school senior who just turned 17 last week is on cloud nine, having proven the sky's the limit for her highest dreams.

Kamora Freeland, a senior at Kingsborough Early College High School in Brooklyn — an honors student who skipped 11th grade and is heading to Spelman College in the fall — has become the youngest African-American female pilot to earn her private license.

On Monday, Feb. 26 at Republic Airport in Farmingdale, Long Island, the Mariners Harbor teen took “the biggest test” of her life— her check ride, the final step to getting her private pilot's license. And she passed!

“I love flying and I have a passion for it,” Freeman said, noting that the views are what first drew her into flying. “Plus, pilots can make up to a salary of \$700,000, so that caught my attention, too. The next step is to become a commercial airline pilot.”

For her check ride test on Feb. 26, Freeland took the three-hour test with a DPE, or Designated Pilot Examiner. However, having left her home early in the morning for the 90 minute-drive to Long Island for the test, Kamora was “nerve-wracked” when her test flight was delayed due to weather condition.

Luckily, the skies cleared up and all systems were go for her landmark test. Surrounded by family, including parents Lakema and David Freeland, Kamora completed her test with flying colors.

The talented student, who brought the Go-Pro device that she received for her birthday to record her flight, attributes her success upon landing to her mom and dad, saying, “My parents believe in me and that builds up my courage and ambition.”

Prior to the test, the young pilot — who earned a full scholarship to Spelman to study economics — completed a solo cross country flight in December 2023, at just 16 years old.

“A solo cross country flight is when you fly to three different airports alone,” explained Kamora's proud mom, Lakema Freeland. “She flew solo to two airports in Connecticut and Republic Airport in Farmingdale.”

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Staten Island Honors Student Becomes Licensed Pilot, Makes History At Age 17

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Staten Islander Kamora Freeland, a senior at Kingsborough Early College High School in Brooklyn — an honors student who skipped 11th grade who is heading to Spelman College in the fall has become the youngest African American female pilots to earn her private pilot's license. (Courtesy Clear Eye Visuals)

“She has been taking flying lessons three times a week, starting at the age of 15. Now she is the youngest African American female licensed pilot. I am overjoyed,” her mom added.

Growing up as the youngest of four siblings, Kamora always found security in the presence of her two older brothers. However, when they left home to pursue their education, Kamora took her mother's advice and embarked on a journey of self-discovery and personal growth.

It was during this transformative period that Kamora discovered her love for flying airplanes. A chance encounter with an aviation program for underprivileged children, initiated by two dedicated NYC police officers, opened

doors for Kamora at exactly the right time.

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Staten Island Honors Student Becomes Licensed Pilot, Makes History At Age 17

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Ultimately, Kamora's journey led her to her first cross country solo flight in December 2023, at 16 years of age making history that is a testament to her power of perseverance of pursuing her passion.

So, does Kamora ever get nervous when she flies? "No way," she said. "I hope my journey to becoming a pilot and making history inspires other young people to reach for the stars.

"I believe that the sky's the limit and you can do anything you put your mind to."

- [Dr. Gracelyn Santos | gsantos@siadvance.com](mailto:gsantos@siadvance.com)

(Editor's note: This article is part of an Advance/SILive.com Women's History Month special series, "History Makers," which profiles Staten Islanders making important, lasting impact on our community. Do you have someone you would like to nominate for a profile? E-mail their name and a brief nomination to tips@siadvance.com.)

Dates To Remember

October

Oct. 2nd: Rosh Hashanah begins at sundown

Oct. 11th: Yom Kipper begins at sundown

Oct. 14th: Columbus Day

Oct. 31st: Halloween

November

Nov. 1st: All Saint's Day

Nov. 2nd: All Soul's Day

Nov. 3rd: Day Light Savings Ends

Nov. 5th: Election Day

Nov. 11th: Veteran's Day

Nov. 28th: Thanksgiving

Birthdays

October

Oct. 2nd: Mal Weinberg

Oct. 7th: Dave Palughi

Oct. 19th: Mary Alice Cunningham

November

Nov. 3rd: Anne Krzyzanowski

Nov. 7th: Betty Gross

Judge Strikes Down Georgia Ban On Abortions, Allowing Them To Resume Beyond 6 Weeks Into Pregnancy

Reprinted From The September 30, 2024 AP-By Kate Brumback and Jeff Amy

FILE - Abortion rights protesters rally near the Georgia state Capitol in Atlanta, on May 14, (Ben Gray/Atlanta Journal-Constitution via AP) (ASSOCIATED PRESS)

ATLANTA (AP) — A Georgia judge on Monday struck down the state's abortion law, which took effect in 2022 and effectively prohibited abortions beyond about six weeks of pregnancy.

Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney wrote in his order that "liberty in Georgia includes in its meaning, in its protections, and in its bundle of rights the power of a woman to control her own body, to decide what happens to it and in it, and to reject state interference with her healthcare choices."

When the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022 and ended a national right to abortion, it opened the door for state bans. Fourteen states now bar abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with some exceptions. Georgia was

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Judge Strikes Down Georgia Ban On Abortions, Allowing Them To Resume Beyond 6 Weeks

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Abortion rights protesters rally near the Georgia state Capitol in Atlanta, on May 14, (Ben Gray/Atlanta Journal-Constitution via AP) (ASSOCIATED PRESS)

one of four where the bans kick in after about the first six weeks of pregnancy -- which is often before women realize they're pregnant.

The impact of bans has been felt deeply in the South because many people have to travel hundreds of miles to states where abortion procedures can be obtained legally.

The Georgia ruling, if it stands, could open up new avenues to access abortion not only for residents of the state, but for people in nearby states who currently face long trips to places like North Carolina or Illinois.

Georgia's law was passed by state lawmakers and signed by Republican Gov. Brian Kemp in 2019 but it was initially blocked from taking effect until the Supreme Court [overturned Roe v. Wade](#), which had protected the right to an abortion for nearly 50 years.

Kemp has in the past tried to soften its political impact by trying to focus on the health of mothers. Monday, he attacked the ruling.

"Once again, the will of Georgians and their representatives has been overruled by the personal beliefs of one judge," Kemp said in a statement. "Protecting the lives of the most vulnerable among us is one of our most sacred responsibilities, and Georgia will continue to be a place where we fight for the lives of the unborn."

The law prohibited most abortions once a "detectable human heartbeat" was present. Cardiac activity can be detected by ultrasound in cells within an embryo that will eventually become the heart around six weeks into a pregnancy.

Before the law kicked in, there were more than 4,400 abortions each month in Georgia. That has dropped to about 2,400 a month on average since the ban took effect in 2022 according to data compiled for the Society of Family Planning.

McBurney wrote that his ruling means the law in the state returns to what it was before the law was passed in 2019, allowing abortions until roughly 20 weeks into a pregnancy.

"When a fetus growing inside a woman reaches viability, when society can assume care and responsibility for that separate life, then — and only then — may society intervene," McBurney wrote.

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Judge Strikes Down Georgia Ban On Abortions, Allowing Them To Resume Beyond 6 Weeks

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An “arbitrary six-week ban” on abortions “is inconsistent with these rights and the proper balance that a viability rule establishes between a woman’s rights of liberty and privacy and society’s interest in protecting and caring for unborn infants,” the order says.

In part because Georgia has no way for citizens to place initiatives on the ballot, there’s no referendum on abortion rights scheduled for Georgia’s November election this year. But that hasn’t stopped Democrats from trying to keep abortion on center stage as an issue in Georgia, as they try to appeal to women voters and suburbanites.

On Sept. 20, Vice President Kamala Harris visited Atlanta to cast Republican Donald Trump as a threat to women’s freedom and lives, warning Trump would limit abortion access even more if reelected. It’s also a key issue in state legislative races as Democrats try to cut into Republican majorities, particularly in the state House.

Harris came to Atlanta on Sept. 20 after ProPublica reported that [two women](#) in the state died after they did not get proper medical treatment for complications from taking abortion pills to end their pregnancies.

Democrats argue such deaths were a predictable outcome of laws that took effect after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade.

Harris has been outspoken on abortion rights ever since the Supreme Court’s decision more than two years ago, but the Sept. 20 speech was her first focused squarely on the issue since replacing President Joe Biden at the top of the Democratic ticket.

Amber Thurman died after waiting 20 hours for a hospital to treat complications she experienced after taking abortion pills. [Reported by ProPublica](#), the case is the first publicly reported instance of a woman dying because her care was delayed due to a state abortion law.

The news organization also reported on the [death of Candi Miller](#), a woman with lupus, diabetes and hypertension who took abortion pills she ordered online. An autopsy found fetal tissue that hadn’t been expelled and a lethal combination of painkillers, ProPublica reported. The state’s maternal mortality review committee found that Miller’s death was not caused by the abortion medication, and like Thurman’s, was preventable.

Associated Press writer Geoff Mulvihill in Philadelphia contributed reporting.
