



NATIONAL FOSTER YOUTH INSTITUTE

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WHAT THE END OF *ROE V. WADE* WOULD MEAN FOR FOSTER YOUTH

Ending safe and legal abortion would have a drastic ripple effect through the child welfare system, impacting foster youth for generations, says National Foster Youth Institute

LOS ANGELES (MAY 4, 2022) On Monday night, the leaked draft opinion of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health* sent shockwaves through the country with its planned overturn of landmark decision *Roe v. Wade*. Although the official ruling is months away, the draft opinion suggests a significant step backwards for reproductive rights in America. Moreover, it promises a bleak future for America’s child welfare system.

“We all know that the people most impacted by the loss of the right to decide the fate of their own bodies will be the people already marginalized in our society, including those in the foster care system and those who have emerged from it,” said **NFYI Board Chair Wendy Smith**. “Their freedoms and dignity, as well as their supports, have already often been compromised. The stripping away of the right to make reasoned decisions about their own bodies and futures is unconscionable.”

For decades, opponents to legal abortion services have suggested adoption as a blanket alternative to abortion without an informed understanding of the adoption experience, the long-term impacts of foster care, or the child welfare system itself.

The current strain on foster care systems across the nation is [well-documented](#). [Virginia’s](#) foster children are bedding down everywhere from hotel rooms to offices, a shortage of placements in [Illinois](#) has left youth in care cycling from bed to bed without any sense of stability, and [Texas](#) is confronting conspiracies to sexually traffic foster children from within its own Department of Family Protective Services. Watching the strain that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused makes it easy to imagine what an additional nation-wide influx of unwanted children would do to a system already on the verge of collapse.

Even for newborns going directly to adoptive families, the road is not always smooth— failed adoptions (situations when children are adopted but later returned to foster care) occur an



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[estimated](#) 10-25% of the time, often catalyzing a traumatic experience that leaves children reentering the foster care system— sometimes again and again.

“As a former foster youth, I understood from a young age the importance of legal rights and protections in ensuring my safety; I had a legal and human right to be free from family abuse,” said **NFYI Policy Intern and Berkeley Law candidate Anna Judson**. “As a foster youth advocate, the debate over pregnancy, bodily autonomy, and family planning are deeply personal. We are a community that has been denied family stability and, overwhelmingly, bodily respect. Now, more than ever, I hope our community will amend law, policy, and politics to protect the rights we hold most dear.”

The struggles foster youth grapple with do not simply end once they are out of care; former foster youth face lifelong challenges, including [worse educational outcomes](#) (only 55% of foster youth graduate from high school), [higher rates](#) of homelessness (about *half* of foster youth will experience homelessness), and [higher rates](#) of PTSD (about 30%).

Current and former foster children are also [far more likely](#) to be sex trafficked (an estimated 60% of sexually trafficked children are current or former foster youth). In the instances that lead to pregnancy, forcing an abused child to carry that pregnancy to term has the potential to do deep psychological damage.

Teen pregnancy in general is a [significant issue](#) for youth in the foster system. Young women in foster care are 2.5 times more likely than their peers to become pregnant by age 19, and 50% of young men in foster care report impregnating a partner by age 21 (compared to just 19% of their peers). Unfortunately, foster youth who become parents in their teens are also more likely to have their own children placed in foster care — [one report](#) notes that 22% percent of were investigated for child abuse or neglect and 11% had a child placed in foster care.

“The sentiment of ‘adoption is an option’ is not the easy cure-all abortion alternative anti-choice advocates think it is. Those of us who have survived the child welfare system can vouch for that,” said **Jacqueline Burbank, NFYI Communications Director**. “The reality of what it offers is a system of forced retraumatization of abused children that will help create second and third generations of foster youth and decrease their chances of escaping the cycle.”

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About NFYI: Launched in 2012, **National Foster Youth Institute** was created to organize foster youth and families, foster care alumni, and allies across the country to mobilize around transforming the child welfare system. NFYI annually engages over 250 current and former foster youth across the US.

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