

Massachusetts Chapter

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American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



The MCAAP Statement on Youth Reproductive Health July 18, 2022

The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MCAAP) is a member organization of over 1,600 pediatricians, pediatric residents, medical students, and affiliates who are dedicated to advocating for Massachusetts children and pediatricians. The Chapter is committed to protecting the physical and emotional health of all youth and therefore expresses serious concern over the recent Supreme Court ruling of *Dobbs v. Jackson* that places adolescent confidential healthcare and access to critical health services at risk. The implications of this landmark ruling are significant and constitute an immediate threat to the wellbeing of youth.

Pediatricians offer developmentally informed and science-backed care to optimize child and adolescent health and wellness. We understand there are specific impacts of the Supreme Court ruling on adolescents, whose special needs are often neglected in policy considerations. Children and teens, particularly those of color and/or lower socioeconomic status, are at equal or higher risk of unintended and medically dangerous pregnancies and yet are more vulnerable than adults based on:

- their limited independent access to health services based on transportation and insurance
- their evolving and sometimes fragile family situations in which physical and emotional safety is not always ensured
- their limited legal standing in making life-altering decisions regarding their own health
- their limited autonomy in making life-altering decisions regarding their own education.

The MCAAP believes that an evidence-based and patient-focused perspective is critical in addressing the unique reproductive health needs of youth. The Chapter supports the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Policy Statement [“The Adolescent’s Right to Confidential Care When Considering Abortion,”](#) first published in 1989 and reaffirmed in 2022, which states “that the rights of adolescents under 18 years of age to confidential care when considering legal medical and surgical abortion therapies should be protected”. The policy statement includes key recommendations for adolescent confidential care and articulates the risks that restrictive abortion policies pose to the health of adolescents by creating delays in time-sensitive and potentially life-saving medical treatment, creating additional stressors in family relationships, and limiting pregnancy care options.

The MCAAP applauds the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for legislative and executive actions taken to protect the safety of all individuals who are or may become pregnant. Massachusetts stands among sixteen states and the District of Columbia which have codified the affirmative right to abortion under state law. Massachusetts has gone further in providing legal protection to healthcare professionals who offer appropriate reproductive services to Massachusetts state residents and out-of-state visitors.

The Chapter is wary of implications of the Dobbs ruling and statements on possible further judicial action limiting the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and access to contraceptive care. It is imperative that our state legislature reinforces protections that allow adolescents to be safe and well at a time when other states are limiting rights. The MCAAP also supports legislation that ensures standardized comprehensive health education is provided to children and adolescents, explicitly including developmentally informed content on sexuality and consent.

The MCAAP continues to advocate for improvements in youth mental health access as we face the widely acknowledged mental health crisis. There are unintended mental health consequences of all major policy shifts, including the Dobbs ruling. The national discourse on limiting access to critical health services serves to diminish the feeling of safety of adolescents and has the potential to further erode their wellbeing. Children and youth who can access all needed services are much more likely to be happy, healthy, and able to pursue their goals.

The MCAAP encourages pediatricians to align with the AAP, the Massachusetts Medical Society, and other major medical specialty societies in declaring our commitment to reproductive health of all individuals regardless of age, race, or gender. We must continue to dedicate ourselves to provide example and leadership in advocating for the health of all children.