

**GW RAGE: The George Washington University's Students Spearheading the Initiative for Abortion Access on Campus.**

**"WE DEMAND MEDICATION ABORTION ON CAMPUS NOW!"**

Pink and white posters swarm The George Washington University's Foggy Bottom campus, calling for the administration to offer pregnancy-termination medication on campus.



These posters are a response to the [Student Government Association bill](#) that requested the University provide medication abortion for students. Students of GW Rage, a student organization devoted to reproductive rights and education, have been advocating for medication abortion to be provided on campus, but the University has not done so.

Medication abortion is a pregnancy termination method that uses mifepristone and misoprostol pills. The mifepristone stops the pregnancy from developing further and misoprostol induces the abortion, in a way similar to a miscarriage. This is seen as a generally safer and more comfortable method of ending a pregnancy than a surgical procedure.

Maddy Niziolek, co-president of GW Rage and leader of Foggy Bottom Plan B, has been advocating for GW to offer this medication. We discussed her work with GW Rage and Foggy Bottom Plan B while her cat Miso loafed in the background, posters reading “POWER TO THE PEOPLE” and “NO UTERUS NO OPINION” were hung on her wall.

Niziolek said, “We had run into a lot of barriers with the administration not responding to our requests, and particularly with the posters, not responding to the bill, we had passed through the Student Government Association, and a petition signed by more than 1000 students...now we've been in meetings with them, to make it a reality.”

Niziolek's work in sexual and reproductive health began in high school where she did peer sex education through Planned Parenthood. She joined GW Rage, previously named Students For Choice, during her freshman year of college and is now in her second year of graduate school working on getting her masters in Public Administration with a concentration on health and gender policy with hopes to continue working in the sexual and reproductive health field.

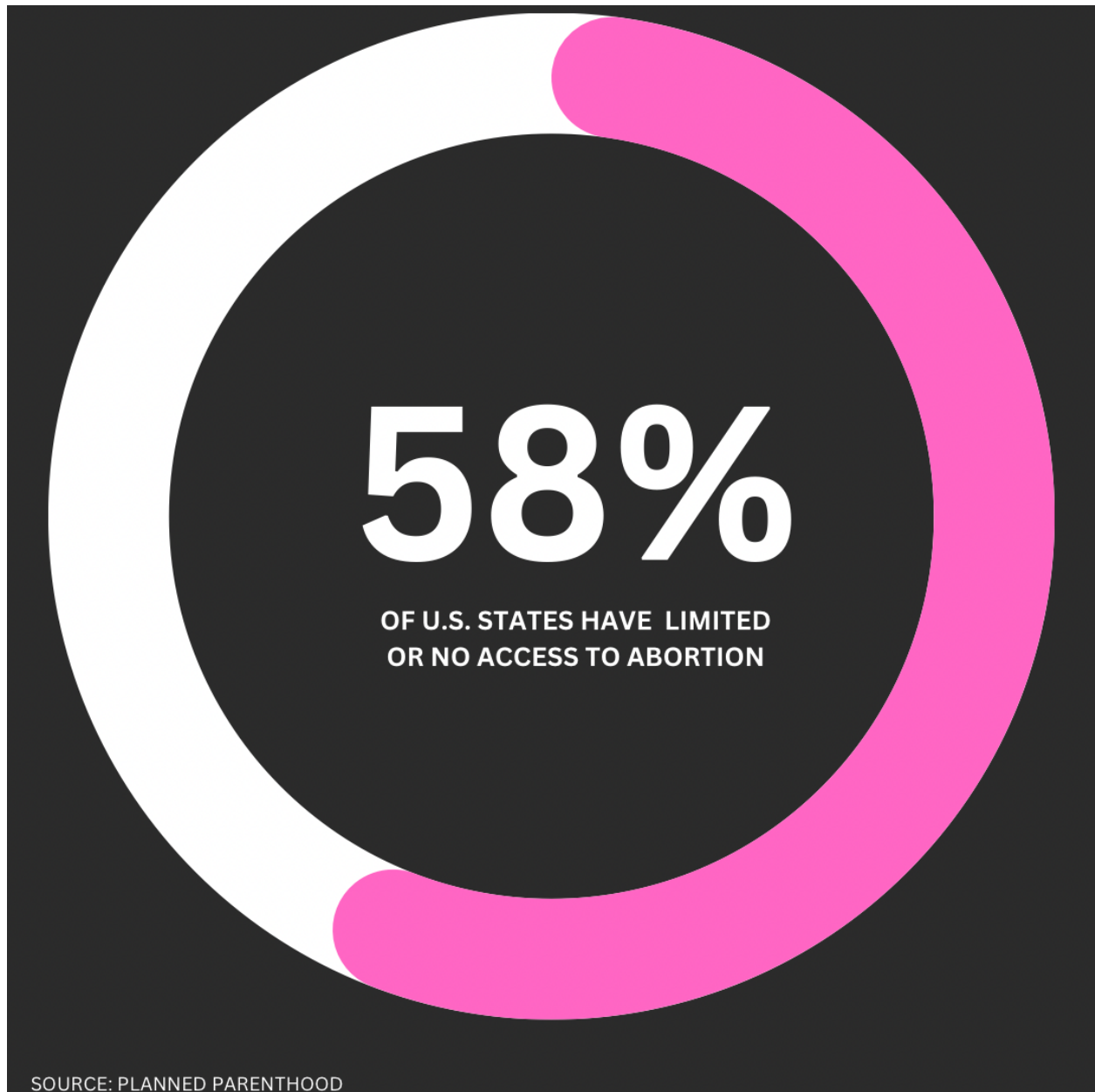
In late February, GW's Student Government Association unanimously passed the [bill](#) to call on the University to provide affordable medication abortion to students on campus. The Student Health Center offers counseling and referrals to outside resources for abortions, however, they are expensive, especially if insurance doesn't cover it. According to Planned Parenthood, a medication abortion costs over \$500 and in clinic abortions are even more expensive. Even if students can find an off-campus clinic to provide an abortion, many will not be able to pay for it.

The main concern administrators have shown towards medication abortion on campus is the Student Health Center's (SHC) lack of ultrasound machines. However, members of GW Rage have given the administration resources that show that they don't need to have ultrasound machines to provide abortion medication. According to the [American Medical Association](#), ultrasounds are not a necessary step in the abortion process.

The University's administration failed to answer multiple requests for a comment. In October of 2023 Colette Coleman, Dean of Students, told GW Rage through email, "SHC is meant to be a primary care practice that refers to specialists when necessary." That was the last statement given on the matter by the administration to the public.

The discussion of medication abortions provided on campus was heightened after Roe v. Wade was overturned in the Dobbs decision. The 1972 decision that protected abortion under the right to privacy in the [14th Amendment](#) was overturned in June of 2022.

According to [CNN](#), As of April 9th, 14 states have fully banned abortions, many without exceptions for rape or incest. These states include Alabama, Kentucky, Arkansas, and Texas. The District of Columbia still protects legal abortions and acts as a safe haven for those living in areas where abortion is illegal.



Many colleges around America have begun offering medication abortions on their campuses since the Dobbs decision that struck down Roe v. Wade. This includes New York, California, and Massachusetts public schools that are required by state law to offer the medication. Some private schools similar to GW offer the medication as well including New York University and Columbia.

GW Rage took immediate action following the Dobbs decision and members also began to advocate for abortion rights in their hometowns. Niziolek said, “The timing was also a little bit unfortunate for students specifically like here at GW because everyone was back home or off campus. And so it was much harder to like, have a community of people to support you.” After

the summer, the organization began researching other schools that offered medication abortions to begin to advocate for the implementation here at GW.

Niziolek said, “For a long time, people in repro(reproductive health care) knew that Roe was going to be overturned and were really preparing for a world without Roe **because as much as we knew that Roe was the floor, not the ceiling of what abortion access could look like in this country it is about to get a lot worse.**”

The implementation of offering medication abortion on campus would be just the latest step taken by the University to provide reproductive care to students. In January, the University installed vending machines in the University Student Center with Plan B for sale. Plan B is an emergency contraceptive that reduces the chances of pregnancy if taken soon after sex. The initial vending machines were not used often, as the prices were \$30 and not available at all times.

The vending machines were recently updated to be open at all times, let students pay with their Gworld (student ID card), and prices were reduced to \$15. This was largely due to the work of GW Rage and campus [petitions](#) advocating for reduced Plan B prices. According to Niziolek, this change was effective and went from selling 30 doses a semester to more than 250 doses a semester.

The installation of these vending machines inspired a similar initiative at American University. Lane Thimmesch, President of AU REPRO, said their Plan B vending machines wouldn’t be possible without the previous implementation of them on GW’s campus, calling GW’s vending machines “the blueprint.” Thimmesch also made sure to mention Niziolek and the work she is doing at GW RAGE calling her ‘an amazing leader and friend.’ American University opened their vending machines following a [petition](#) signed by over 1,000 students and a protest on their campus in November.

Thimmesch founded AU REPRO during her Freshman year of college in the spring 2023 semester. She has remained the President since its foundation and aims to grow the organization as she moves towards her degree in International Studies. When discussing the goals of AU REPRO, she listed off many aspirations including “destigmatizing abortion, emergency contraceptive distribution, and sexual education programming on campus.” AU REPRO has not yet begun advocating for the University to offer medication abortion on campus but Thimmesch plans to do so in the future.

Foggy Bottom community members are also able to receive free Plan B from the Foggy Bottom Plan B organization. Niziolek explained their mission: “To provide free emergency contraception to anyone who needs it, so we deliver discreetly, confidentially, and typically within 24 hours.”

Foggy Bottom holds The George Washington University's main campus as well as the Kennedy Center and The State Department.

Many of the members of GW Rage and Foggy Bottom Plan B overlap as they have similar missions, but Foggy Bottom Plan B is not affiliated with The George Washington University as they don't align with GW's institutional policies, thus funding for the products comes from donations and sponsors only. The GW administration has failed to tell members of GW Rage as to why they do not fit the University's policies.

Foggy Bottom Plan B also provides condoms, pregnancy tests, and other sexual health products. The organization uses volunteers to deliver Plan B in a discreet way anywhere in the Foggy Bottom area. Many members of the larger D.C. community use the resources they provide and meet volunteers at the Foggy Bottom metro stop.

Madeleine Will, a volunteer with Foggy Bottom Plan B and member of GW Rage, explained why she joined. Will said, "I'm from Kentucky where abortions are completely illegal and I've always been very interested in reproductive health care. I want to help in any way I can while I'm away from home."

To utilize Foggy Bottom Plan B, fill out the [form on their website](#), where they will ask for either your email address or phone number, your preferred pickup location, and available times for delivery. The form also offers a place to ask for a preferred gender to deliver your medicine and allows you to decide if you want an extra Plan B pill, condoms, and pregnancy tests.

Many George Washington students aren't aware of the work of Foggy Bottom Plan B. GW Junior Sidney Chesley, when asked about the organization, said, "I had no idea we could get them for free, I wish I knew that sooner." This is not uncommon, when asked about their knowledge of Foggy Bottom Plan B more than 10 members of the GW community also said they were not aware of its existence.

Volunteers are now trying to find new ways to make students aware of their organization, however, their separation from GW doesn't help. Will said, "The main issue with the University not acknowledging us as an organization, besides the lack of financial resources, is that many students don't know we exist."

A similar service is offered by the University named, Junk Mail. This service offers free delivery of safe sex products to GW students and is a collaborative project from GW Rage and the GW Office of Health Promotion & Education. This service works very similarly to Foggy Bottom Plan B except it doesn't offer Plan B or pregnancy tests and is not in service over the summer or to the larger Foggy Bottom community.

Emily Htway, GW's first Sexual Health Specialist within the GW Office of Health Promotion & Education, worked closely with members of GW Rage like Ninzienok to make this project come to life. Htway explains her goals in her position as creating a safe environment for students to discuss safe sex and give them access to contraceptives.

GW Rage is just one example of student movements and organizations working towards sexual education and access to reproductive healthcare occurring at Universities across the United States. There is currently a FaceBook group named 'GW Students for Life' with 164 followers which opposes GW Rage's intentions of getting the University to provide pregnancy-terminating medication.

When wrapping up our discussion, Niziolek explained what first got her interested in reproductive health care. She said, "I had endometriosis, so I had really severe pelvic pain and just like horrible interactions with OBGYN and like just such a lack of knowledge. So I really started doing pure sex ed, because I wanted to be able to get the knowledge that I didn't get to have about sex ed and about my body... and be able to advocate for myself." Endometriosis is a disease where tissue grows outside of the uterus causing extreme pelvic pain.

Niziolek is now working in the reproductive rights and advocacy field wearing many different hats. She works for Catholics for Choice doing fundraising work, works as a doula and serves on the leadership team for DC Doulas For Choice, and is the co-leader of the Youth Abortion Support Collective in the Mid-Atlantic Region through Advocates for Youth. She is determined to continue to fight for medication abortion at GW as she continues her advocacy work.

As students like Maddy Niziolek continue to advocate for cheap on-campus medication abortion GW students can continue hoping for this change. The administration is currently in communication with GW Rage about providing this care, although no decisions have been made.

Niziolek said, "Understanding how life-changing it is for young people to have information and to have the resources they need in order to access the health care they deserve, that's what keeps me going in the movement."