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Keeping It Together: Standing Strong and Pushing Forward

What to Watch Part 2

Now that most of the federal and state governments have seated their new administrations, all eyes are on policy changes and their impact on people in local communities. Those policy changes are coming fast and furiously, leaving confusion and uncertainty in their path. Any policy that creates more challenges for everyday people will be disproportionately more challenging for women and girls—especially women and girls of color and those with lower incomes. That’s why Advocacy & Communication Solutions (ACS) is watching closely.

[In Part 1 of What to Watch](#), we shared three trends that we anticipate may affect multiple federal programs and policies in education, reproductive justice, and women’s leadership.

1. The new administration has started to use **rules and executive orders to eliminate protections related to gender and race** under Title IX and the Civil Rights Act. While legislative activity is also another viable vehicle to make such changes, the requirement of a supermajority to make some of these changes is a tough challenge for the slim majority in Congress.
2. While many sources of federal funding require Congressional action to eliminate, the new administration is already **using the power it has to chip away at the scope and size of various grants, programs, and services to minimize their funding and impact.** The President's nationwide freeze on federal grants starting January 27 temporarily threw programs—like those that provide housing assistance, disaster relief, and other services to families in need, including Medicaid—into uncertainty. Some of the freezes are likely to thaw, but programs may look differently than before. Regardless, the President has laid his cards on the table, making it clear what kinds of actions and approaches may soon be on the horizon. For the time being, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) have not been affected.¹
3. Funding for federal programs such as Title I (**funding that provides support to schools for economically disadvantaged children and the Secure Rural Schools program^{2,3}, which is a lifeline for rural counties**

UPDATE: The ACS Fund for Women & Girls



In 2024, ACS Co-Founders Lori McClung and Scarlett Boudier

started the ACS Fund for Women & Girls to celebrate the company's 20th Anniversary. The Fund focuses on providing low-income women and girls—particularly those of color—with increased access to reproductive justice, higher education, and pathways to elected office. Thank you to those who contributed generously to the Fund last year, allowing us to make \$42,000 in grants to three organizations in December 2024—The Matriots, Preterm, and Say Yes Cleveland. This year, as new federal and state leadership is seated, the work of the ACS Fund is more important than ever. Please consider supporting this work with your financial contribution to the ACS Fund at its new home, The Community Foundation of Lorain County. Donate today!

¹reuters.com/world/us/nutrition-programs-unaaffected-by-trump-funding-freeze-white-house-says-2025-01-28/

²calmatters.org/education/k-12-education/2024/06/rural-schools/

³As of December 23, 2024, the US House had failed to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools Act.

oregoncapitalchronicle.com/2024/12/23/u-s-house-fails-to-reauthorize-20-year-old-bipartisan-bill-to-fund-rural-schools-communities/

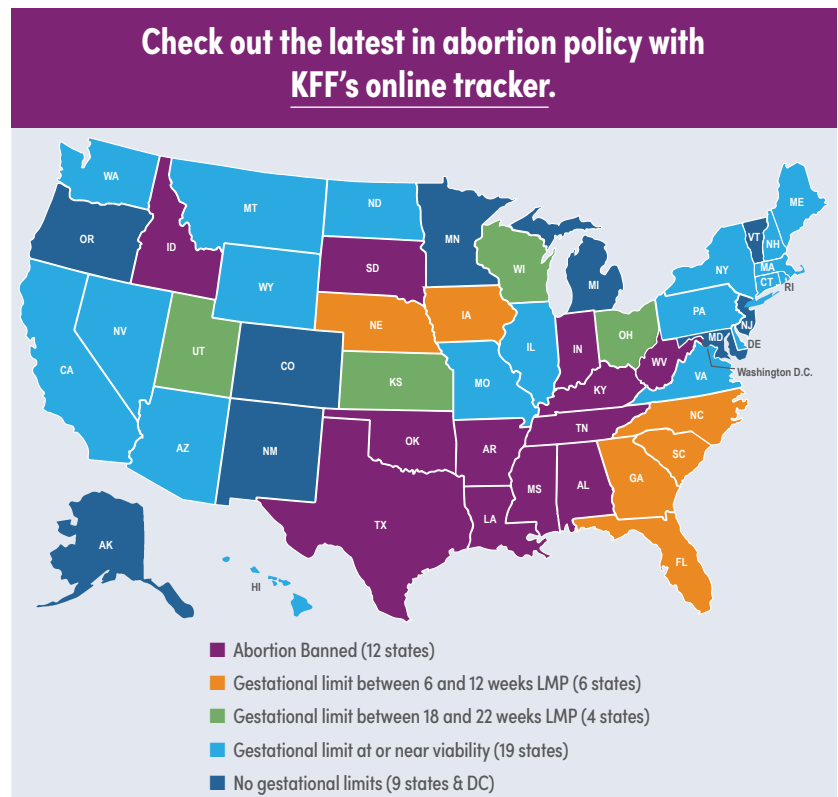
to support schools, road upkeep and other needs) could be distributed as block grants under the guise of “flexibility to states.” They also might include new parameters around the use of those Title funds. Look for rules associated with Title I block grants to reinforce policies such as school choice, conservative curriculum standards, reductions in educator qualifications, and weakening of unions.

In the last issue, we explored how these trends might play out more specifically in terms of potential impacts for K-12 and higher education. In this issue, we take a closer look at their potential impacts for reproductive justice and women’s public sector leadership.

ISSUE: Reproductive Justice

When women have access to abortion and related reproductive health services, free of bureaucratic red tape, they are more likely to participate in the labor force and achieve economic security, improve educational outcomes, and have improved health outcomes.⁴

With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2022, women’s access to reproductive healthcare became the purview of individual states. As of December 20, 2024, 18 states had outlawed abortion or significantly restricted it. On the other hand, 28 states had enacted protections for abortion rights through constitutional amendments or new laws.⁵ Confusion and uncertainty about abortion laws have hampered providers’ abilities to deliver other reproductive health



⁴americanprogress.org/article/playbook-for-the-advancement-of-women-in-the-economy/protecting-and-increasing-abortion-access/#:~:text=For%20nearly%2050%20years%2C%20the,the%20U.S.%20economy%20at%20large

⁵kff.org/womens-health-policy/dashboard/abortion-in-the-u-s-dashboard/

services, such as care for miscarriages and pregnancy-related emergencies, as well as clinical counseling.⁶

To further complicate and limit understanding of reproductive laws, on his second day in office, President Trump removed the word “abortion” from search results on the Department of Health and Human Services’ website, denying access to essential information.⁷

Implications

- ▶ The administration’s recent freeze in public funding may create uncertainty around Medicaid dollars, potentially limiting access to reproductive healthcare for millions of women.⁸
- ▶ It’s likely that a federal abortion ban law will be introduced in Congress, but questionable whether it will pass. President Trump has indicated that he is not likely to push for a national law but rather leave the decision to the states (the precedent set by the Supreme Court’s decision). Project 2025 proposes eliminating access to the drug mifepristone, which is used for medication abortion, and could potentially bypass Congressional approval by invoking the Comstock Act, an 1873 law that prohibited mailing of abortion aids.⁹
- ▶ Expect to see more states introduce legislation or ballot measures to codify either permanent restrictions or permanent protections for abortion access.
- ▶ There is a possibility that federal or state lawmakers will continue to introduce legislation to ban medication abortion (abortion pills) or interstate travel to obtain an abortion, as well as measures to track the shipment of mifepristone. Texas challenged the FDA’s approval of mifepristone, wanting to roll back FDA actions that allowed for the use of the drug up to 10 weeks of pregnancy and allowed for a woman to

As of
December 20, 2024,
employees at the Louisiana
Department of Health were
instructed to stop promoting
COVID, flu and MPOX
vaccines.

⁶[kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/dobbs-era-abortion-bans-and-restrictions-early-insights-about-implications-for-pregnancy-loss/#:~:text=Since%20Dobbs%2C%20clinicians%20in%20abortion,most%20circumstances%20\(Figure%202\)](https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/dobbs-era-abortion-bans-and-restrictions-early-insights-about-implications-for-pregnancy-loss/#:~:text=Since%20Dobbs%2C%20clinicians%20in%20abortion,most%20circumstances%20(Figure%202))

⁷[npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/01/21/nx-s1-5269875/trump-abortion-hhs-reproductive-rights](https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/01/21/nx-s1-5269875/trump-abortion-hhs-reproductive-rights)

⁸[gjmc.com/view/trump-s-federal-grant-freeze-threatens-medicaid-funding](https://www.gjmc.com/view/trump-s-federal-grant-freeze-threatens-medicaid-funding)

⁹[guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/how-project-2025-seeks-obliterate-srhr](https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/how-project-2025-seeks-obliterate-srhr)

use mifepristone without an in-person clinic visit, but that challenge was rejected by the Supreme Court in 2024.

- ▶ In more extreme states, lawmakers may attempt to make access to birth control illegal, completely denying women autonomy over their own reproductive systems.

As a result of these activities, the United States will maintain a state-by-state patchwork of access that disproportionately affects women in more restrictive states and penalizes women who do not have the means to travel or access abortion medications online. Federal judicial appointments for the next four years are likely to include more judges who oppose abortion rights, making it more difficult for legal challenges to state-level abortion laws to succeed.

Beyond abortion access, women may also see preventive reproductive health care curbed. Should Robert Kennedy Jr. be approved by the Senate as the Secretary of Health and Human Services, his anti-vaccine stance could restrict access to vaccines for diseases like HPV or hepatitis, MMR, TDAP, Flu, meningitis, or COVID-19.

Although conservative lawmakers have long targeted the Affordable Care Act and called for its repeal, the likelihood of rolling it back appears slim, since 41 states have now expanded Medicaid coverage and are counting on the attendant federal funding. However, reductions in services are a possibility and could include the elimination of coverage for preventive reproductive health services like birth control, lab tests, and screening for Hepatitis B/C, HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases.

What ACS is Doing

Through the ACS Fund for Women & Girls, ACS is supporting reproductive justice by making grants to organizations that provide abortion access, as well as other essential reproductive health care. Anyone who cares about ensuring access to reproductive justice can contribute to the Fund.

What You Can Do: Resources for Action

- Now more than ever, women seeking abortions and the providers who serve them need financial support. Visit the National Network of Abortion Funds to find a local fund near you.

- Dive into the issues. Guttmacher Institute is a great resource for research and policy analysis.

- Get active in advocacy! To stay abreast of proposed policy changes and to plug into advocacy networks, visit Reproductive Freedom for All or SisterSong, which focuses specifically on reproductive justice for women of color.

ISSUE: Public Service Careers

When women hold elected offices, the issues affecting women and girls receive more attention and support. A study from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research found that, “In general, states with higher levels of women’s representation also have more women-friendly policy¹⁰.” This makes perfect sense, because only women have women’s lived experiences and wisdom to bring into policy decision making.

A 2024 Gallup poll found that 57 percent of Americans believe that having more women in elected office would result in a better-run country.¹¹ Even though women have twice been rejected by U.S. voters to hold the top leadership position, women will make up 28.7 percent of the U.S. House of Representatives (125 seats) and 25 percent of the Senate (25 seats) in 2025. At the state level, women will assume a record-breaking 13 governorships and hold 33.2 percent of seats in state legislatures across the country.¹² The governing bodies of Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada will be majority female.¹³

Implications

While elected public representation for women is (slightly) looking up, serving as paid public official—a role dominated by women, particularly at the state and local levels—may become more challenging, especially for women who espouse more progressive values. Budget cuts may result in less attractive compensation for government service and fewer positions to fill. “Schedule F,” which has been reinstated via executive order, removes employment security measures for many federal employees. And a growing “anti-big-government” sentiment may diminish respect for those serving in public roles—elected or not.

On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued an executive order titled “Restoring Accountability to Policy-Influencing Positions Within the Federal Workforce,” reinstating the Schedule F classification. This order changes federal employees from an “F” classification to a “policy/career” classification, removing traditional civil service protections and making it easier to hire and fire employees in these roles.¹⁴

¹⁰iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/i910.pdf

¹¹thehill.com/changing-america/respect/equality/4517330-gallup-over-half-of-americans-think-u-s-would-be-better-governed-with-more-women-in-office/

¹²cawp.rutgers.edu/blog/congressional-statewide-results-women-2024

¹³ncsl.org/womens-legislative-network/women-in-state-legislatures-for-2025

¹⁴federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2025/01/trump-revives-executive-order-aiming-to-strip-some-federal-employees-of-civil-service-protections/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

What ACS is Doing

The [ACS Fund for Women & Girls](#) supports organizations that help recruit, train, and support women candidates for local, state, and national offices. In addition, ACS provides advice to women candidates to help steer them toward campaign success.

What You Can Do: Resources for Action

The 2026 mid-term election cycle is looming!

- If you've ever dreamed about running for public office or know someone who should, consider that now may be the perfect time.
- Learn more and get support from national organizations like [Emily's List](#) (which specifically serves Democratic, pro-choice women) or the nonpartisan organization [She Should Run](#).
- To find local candidate support in your area, review the list of organizations posted by the [Center for American Women and Politics](#) at Rutgers University or check with a political party's headquarters.

Not ready to be a candidate yourself?

- Consider joining your local political party chapter—it's a great way to learn about upcoming races and candidates.
- Find a woman candidate who shares your values and support her campaign with your time, talent, or treasure. From local municipal or county boards to statewide offices, there are many ways to focus your energy on promising women candidates!

Broader Actions to Stand Strong and Push Forward

No matter what issues concern you the most, there are things any organization can do RIGHT NOW to stand strong and push forward for the causes you care about.

1. Assess what is bluster and what is real. While truth might be tough to assess, we cannot immediately assume the worst and throw up our hands. Get to know the full story. Lean on ACS content like our [newsletters](#), [eBlasts](#), and [Latest News](#); and read from reliable sources that outline the facts. At the national level, we like [The Hill](#), [Education Week](#), and [AllSides](#).
2. Lead with your values, even if federal or state actions undermine them. There is always something to fight for when it comes to women and girls. Stand up for what you believe in with courage and conviction. Others will follow, and you are not alone. Learn how you can push against regulations and when/how to take an issue to court. In addition to social justice attorneys in your area, reach out to organizations like the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) or an [American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\)](#) chapter in your state.

- 3. Plan what you can offer to the conversation that is unique and provides greater insight to decision makers or community members. Every issue has multiple facets, and presenting different ways of looking at a question or challenge can diffuse polarizing rhetoric and bring more perspective into the discussion. It's not only disarming but also can lead to better decision making.

This work will not be easy, and we have always known it wouldn't be. But it is vital, and none of us is in it alone. If you need resources, ideas, allies, or even just a pep talk, please let us know. ACS is fighting beside you and is here for you—now and throughout the next four years.

WANT MORE?

Want to learn how communication, strategy development, advocacy, or capacity building can move your organization forward?
 Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations?
 Contact one of our team members, call toll free at 1-877-372-0166, or visit our website at advocacyandcommunication.org.

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IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Fall 2024 Newsletter

Advocacy & Communication SOLUTIONS

CONNECTIONS TO THE ISSUES

What really is meant by the term "civic engagement?"

According to the Institute for Public and Civic Engagement, civic engagement is a term that encompasses a wide array of activities that contribute to a more effective democracy. This includes voting, volunteering, participating in community meetings, and more.

Don't Just Stand There... Do Something!

How Being a Civically Engaged Citizen Helps Shape Our Communities and More

Civic engagement (sometimes called civic participation) is the backbone of a thriving democracy. It allows citizens to be active participants in the policies and decisions that affect their lives, and contributes to building stronger, more resilient communities. At its core, true civic engagement involves being informed and understanding how one's actions can help impact the broader political system.

Summer 2024 Newsletter

Advocacy & Communication SOLUTIONS

CONNECTIONS TO THE ISSUES

When the Going Gets Tough, Make Sure Your Organization is Tougher!

Crises are inevitable for any organization. But how you respond can mean the difference between recovery and reputational damage. Being prepared for a crisis is not just a "nice to have," it's necessary. Whether facing a natural disaster, a data breach, or any unexpected event, an effective crisis communication plan provides a clear roadmap to navigate turbulent times, helping your organization emerge stronger and more resilient—well ahead of the competition.

A crisis won't wait for you to be ready. By working through the six phases of crisis communication—planning, the Crisis, Triage, Assessment, Resolution, Evaluation, and Post-Crisis—your organization can prepare now and stay resilient to get you through the tough times.