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MY VIEW CYNTHIA FEIDEN-WARSH

Legislature must assure reproductive rights

By Cynthia Feiden-Warsh

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The Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which ensured the right to abortion nationwide, felt like a gut punch. A right many of us took for granted is no longer available to 36 million people, based entirely on where they live.

We are fortunate to live in a state that respects the rights of women to make our own health care choices. The 1969 New Mexico law that criminalized abortion was overturned in the 2021 legislative session — just in time. The executive order signed by the governor ensures New Mexico providers are protected, regardless of where the patient resides.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has committed to codifying a woman's right to abortion, which is critical given that our state courts have not determined if the constitution as currently written protects the right to an abortion. We urge her and the Legislature to introduce the bill early in the session.

At the same time that the Legislature and executive work to codify the right to abortion, we need to address the issue of access for both medical and surgical abortions. This means increasing the use of telehealth visits, integrating reproductive health programs in community health centers throughout the state and improving broadband access in rural areas.

We must also continue to address the issue of teen pregnancy, which is connected to poverty, school dropout rates and living in a rural area (26 of the 33 counties in New Mexico are designated rural). Teen pregnancy declined in New Mexico by 42% between 1998 and 2011, but it is not decreasing as quickly compared to the rest of the U.S.

New Mexico ranks 50th in teen pregnancy rate and 46th in teen birth rates. Implementing the Long Acting Reversible Contraceptives program addresses some of the issues that lead to teen pregnancy. And when a teen gets pregnant, it is critical that they have the choice to have a legal abortion.

The state Legislature convenes shortly. Let's all call our senators and representatives and insist they work to guarantee New Mexico remains a model of compassion, home to excellent health care for women and a place where the right to privacy is respected.

Cynthia Feiden-Warsh is the co-chair of the Reproductive Rights Committee for Indivisible SOS Santa Fe.