

# PROJECT 2025: THE IMPACT ON BLACK WOMEN

## POLICY BRIEF

In 2023, the Heritage Foundation and more than 100 other conservative groups published *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*,<sup>1</sup> 900 pages of recommendations for reshaping the executive branch of the government. The *Mandate* includes a right-wing policy agenda, entitled the “2025 Presidential Transition Project,” also known as “Project 2025.” Project 2025’s detailed agenda proposes to consolidate executive power and offers policy recommendations to address what the authors deem to be critical issues affecting people living in the United States (US).

While attention is being paid to Project 2025’s overall goals and harms, little of that attention is focused specifically on the impact on Black communities, low-income communities, and other marginalized groups. The following analysis by In Our Own Voice: National Black Women’s Reproductive Justice Agenda provides an overview of the goals of Project 2025 and its harmful impact on Reproductive Justice.

### What is Reproductive Justice?

Reproductive Justice is rooted in a holistic human rights framework and the belief that every person is entitled to the right to control our bodies, our sexuality, our gender, our work, and our reproduction. Reproductive Justice can only be achieved when *all* individuals have the complete economic, social, and political power, as well as mental, physical, and community health, to make their *own* decisions about their bodies and their futures.

### Project 2025 aims to strip power from every individual in the United States

Project 2025 very clearly aims to strip the essential right to control our own bodies, sexuality, gender, work, and reproduction. The recommended policy changes would equip policymakers with tools to fully dismantle bodily autonomy—the fundamental human right that gives people the power to make decisions about their bodies without outside influence or coercion. In so doing, Project 2025 will further entrench white supremacy and misogyny across our nation’s institutions.

The impact will be particularly harsh for Black individuals. Black women, girls, and gender-expansive people are dynamic leaders across myriad communities and sectors. At the same time, they face increasing state,

local, and federal attacks on their human rights. These include the loss of *Roe v. Wade*’s protections and the resulting abortion bans in dozens of state (which include five states with the highest Black populations<sup>2</sup>); attempts to circumvent LGBTQIA+ liberation; disproportionately high Black maternal morbidity and mortality rates; environmental injustice fueled by a climate crisis; inaccessible or inadequate health care; pay inequality and workplace discrimination; unaffordable housing; voter suppression and voting restrictions; and countless other harms. These attacks on basic human rights are enshrined in Project 2025.

Project 2025 will have devastatingly harmful impacts to Reproductive Justice and American society at large. Perhaps most impactful to this issue is Project 2025’s assault on REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE.

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## Reproductive Health Care

**Reproductive Justice holds that every person has the right to make fundamental decisions about how, when, and whether they have children and expand their family.** Reproductive Justice prioritizes bodily autonomy. In *Our Own Voice* and other Reproductive Justice organizations urge federal officials to expand Black women’s access to high-quality, affordable health care before, during, and after pregnancy—including access to prenatal and postpartum care, contraception and abortion care.

The first six pages of the Project 2025 document, *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*, directly articulates the goals of: “deleting the terms... ‘abortion,’ ‘reproductive health,’ ‘reproductive rights,’ ...and any other term used to deprive Americans of their First Amendment rights.”<sup>73</sup> Later in the document, it suggests that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services be renamed the “Department of Life by explicitly rejecting the notion that abortion is health care.”<sup>74</sup> Project 2025’s utmost priority is to strip bodily autonomy from every individual across the US by actively shutting down access to significant components of reproductive health care.

### ABORTION CARE

In addition to the language above, Project 2025 implores the next President and Department of Justice to:

- Misinterpret “long-standing federal laws”<sup>75</sup> such as the Comstock Act (a 19<sup>th</sup>-century law that has not been enforced in decades) in order to ban the mailing of abortion pills, equipment, and emergency contraception.
- Work with Congress to “enact the most robust protections for the unborn that Congress will support while deploying existing federal powers to protect innocent life and vigorously complying with statutory bans on the federal funding of abortion.”<sup>76</sup>

Under Project 2025, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will be tasked with creating a national abortion database and surveillance program, requiring each state to track not only abortions, but pregnancies, miscarriages, and stillbirths. Tracking this data in conjunction with limiting access to care and criminalizing pregnancy outcomes could have a direct impact on maternal health and mortality, which is already a critical issue for Black women who already experience disproportionately higher rates than their counterparts.

### CONTRACEPTION

Under Project 2025, the current Title X program, which provides millions of dollars to ensure that people have access to low- and no-cost contraception, would instead shift its focus entirely to “fertility awareness and holistic family planning” and to “provide educational information on healthy marriage and relationships.”<sup>77</sup> Project 2025 seeks to eliminate coverage for birth control from the Affordable Care Act.

Project 2025 encourages legal protection for employers and pharmacists who refuse to provide contraception and reproductive health care by citing personal religious and moral exemptions.

The Project aims to “pass a law requiring equal (or greater) benefits for pro-life support for mothers and clarifying abortion exclusions,”<sup>78</sup> suggesting that individuals who seek abortion care or contraception, especially through their employee benefits, may find themselves with limited or no access to benefits for reproductive health care.

Other components of Project 2025 will also have direct, negative impact on a wide range of health outcomes. Chronic health conditions impact Black women, girls, and gender-expansive people at higher rates than any other US population, including high blood pressure, heart disease, breast and other reproductive cancers.<sup>9</sup> Black women are three to five times more likely to experience a pregnancy-related death, compared to their white counterparts.<sup>10</sup>

In *Our Own Voice*’s most recent national poll, commissioned ahead of the 2024 election cycle, reveals that nearly one-quarter of Black women aged 18 to 44 worries about their health and safety during pregnancy or childbirth because of their race. Almost 40% consider their risk of death if they get pregnant.<sup>11</sup> This fear is a reasonable one, as states are already undermining the federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act that protects people with life-threatening emergencies, including pregnancy-related crises.<sup>12</sup> These concerns are also valid with issues raised in Project 2025 that would impact maternal health and pregnancy care.

### MATERNAL HEALTH AND PREGNANCY CARE

As in other sections of the document, the elimination of the concept of reproductive health and replacing it with an explicit pro-life focus is seen in this recommenda-

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tion: “The Office of the Secretary should eliminate the HHS Reproductive Healthcare Access Task Force and install a pro-life task force to ensure that all of the department’s divisions seek to use their authority to promote the life and health of women and their unborn children.”<sup>13</sup>

Project 2025 also proposes the use of block grants that would decimate access to Medicaid, the federal program run by the states, which provides health insurance for low-income individuals. Almost half of all US births, and two-thirds of Black births, are covered by Medicaid.<sup>14</sup>

The Project touts its support for doula as “an active option for all women whether they are giving birth in a traditional hospital, through midwifery, or at home” and providing doula care “funding for low-income mothers.”<sup>15</sup> But what this language obscures is that such a policy (and any other proactive reproductive health care policies) is punitive to those who may choose to exercise their bodily autonomy. Project 2025 seeks to “pass a law requiring equal (or greater) benefits for pro-life support for mothers and clarifying abortion exclusions,” suggesting that individuals who seek abortion care or contraception may have to then navigate limited or no access to federal benefits for reproductive health care.

## IVF AND ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

While Project 2025 does not specifically discuss IVF or other medical technologies, the stated goal of deleting the terms “reproductive health” and “reproductive rights,” in conjunction with a focus on defining health care “from conception to natural death”,<sup>16</sup> concerns health care and legal professionals that, as seen in the Alabama Supreme Court ruling in early 2024, states could find a legal basis in regulating life from the moment of conception.<sup>17</sup>

It is just as critical to pay close attention to Project 2025’s efforts to fracture Reproductive Justice by attacking SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY and ECONOMIC JUSTICE.

## Social Justice And Democracy

The work of In Our Own Voice and other Reproductive Justice organizations is always informed by the intersectional impact of systemic racism, sexism, and homophobia. Reproductive Justice requires racial justice, gender justice, and LGBTQIA+ liberation. Racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation differences fundamentally impact how individuals experience life in the US and their ability to fully participate in a robust, functioning democracy. **Reproductive Justice recognizes that representation and political agency is key to bodily autonomy.**

Project 2025 explicitly seeks to eliminate all federal policies designed to promote equity in the US and take away representation and social agency, as shown by the recommendation in the Foreword of “deleting the terms sexual orientation and gender identity (“SOGI”), diversity, equity, and inclusion (“DEI”), gender, gender equality, [and] gender equity.”<sup>18</sup>

## EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Project 2025 treats racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation differences as profane words. One of the key goals is to “expose and make public all training materials and initiatives designed to single out any race, ethnicity, or sex for special treatment.”<sup>19</sup>

At the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Project 2025 writes: “Under the Biden Administration, the Treasury Department has appointed a Counselor for Racial Equity, established an Advisory Committee on Racial Equity, and created an office for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. All these should be eliminated.”<sup>20</sup>

At the U.S. Census Bureau, it would abolish the National Advisory Committee (NAC), whose mission is to address the nation’s accounting of “hard to reach populations, race and ethnicity, language, aging populations, American Indian and Alaska Native tribal considerations, new immigrant populations, populations affected by natural disasters, highly mobile and migrant populations, complex households, rural populations, and population segments with limited access to technology.”<sup>21</sup>

Project 2025 also criticizes the National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers based on the view that it is “overly focused on racial and ‘LGBTQIA+ equity.’”<sup>22</sup>

## LGBTQIA+ RIGHTS

Project 2025 would strip away protections for LGBTQIA+ people by removing all guidance in federal statutes concerning sexual orientation and gender identity, and issuing a “general statement of policy specifying that it will not enforce any prohibition on sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination.”<sup>23</sup>

Project 2025 recommends that the U.S. Department of Defense “reverse policies that allow transgender individuals to serve in the military,” falsely claiming that “gender dysphoria is incompatible with the demands of military service.” Project 2025 also states that “the use of public monies for transgender surgeries or to facilitate abortion for service members should be ended.”<sup>24</sup>

Under Title IX, for organizations receiving federal financial assistance through the Department of Education, the definition of “sex” would “mean only biological sex recognized at birth.”<sup>25</sup>

## VOTING RIGHTS

Project 2025 aims to weaken the federal government’s already limited authority to protect the right to vote through the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and Federal Election Commission (FEC). It opposes measures such as the *John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act* which would help ensure that Black people can vote and counter voter suppression.

Project 2025 states, “the President must ensure that the DOJ, just like the FEC, is directed to only prosecute clear violations of [the Federal Election Campaign Act],” without clarifying what those “clear violations” might be. Although DOJ’s authority to protect voting rights was destroyed by the US Supreme Court (SCOTUS) *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, Project 2025 suggests that “The DOJ should not engage in criminal prosecutions that stretch legal theories and defy FEC interpretations and regulations.”<sup>26</sup>

## Economic Justice

**Reproductive Justice is based on the reality that social and economic supports for parents is essential to health and well-being.** The Reproductive Justice framework considers equal pay, paycheck fairness, minimum wage increases, protection from workplace discrimination, health benefits, childcare, and affordable housing as components of a multi-dimensional and ongoing fight for economic empowerment and self-determination. Project 2025 states an overall goal of “refocusing labor regulation on the good of the family...we must replace ‘woke’ nonsense with a healthy vision of the role of labor policy in our society, starting with [the authors’ definition of] the American family.”<sup>27</sup>

## DISCRIMINATION PROTECTIONS

Project 2025 seeks to weaken the ability for Black women and gender-expansive people to claim legitimate workplace discrimination. It would eliminate the collection of EEO-1 data through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The EEOC currently requires larger employers (employers who have at least 100 employees and federal contractors who have at least 50 employees) to report data about ethnicity. This change in data collection is intended to “eliminate disparate impact as a valid theory of discrimination for race and other bases.”<sup>28</sup>

## HEALTH BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

Project 2025 seeks to keep what it deemed “anti-life ‘benefits’” out of benefit plans, and says that the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) “does not preempt states’ power to restrict abortion.”<sup>29</sup> But 60% of Black women live in states with abortion bans or extreme restrictions since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.<sup>30</sup>



## OVERTIME PAY AND TAX CUTS

Project 2025 seeks to weaken overtime pay protections by reverting back to a lower overtime pay threshold, rather than the current threshold that is “highly beneficial for working women—particularly women of color—and their families... Of the workers impacted by the higher salary threshold, just over 2 million are women, including 700,000 women of color.”<sup>31</sup>

## CHILD CARE

Project 2025 would “prioritize funding for home-based childcare, not universal day care,”<sup>32</sup> assuming that all families have a stay-at-home parent or other family member who can provide this care.

## BENEFIT PROGRAMS

Project 2025 directs the next Administration to “repeal harmful health policies enacted under the Obama and Biden Administrations such as the Medicare Shared Savings Program and Inflation Reduction Act.”<sup>33</sup> These programs provide transformative financial relief for millions of Medicare beneficiaries by expanding key benefits and lowering prescription drug costs. The financial impacts would be devastating.

Project 2025 establishes work requirements and proposes significant cuts, especially tied into language around sex and gender, for essential social support programs related to health and wellness like Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Temporary Assistance Program for Needy Families (TANF), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). Another recommendation is the complete elimination of the federal Head Start early education program. These changes would deprive vulnerable populations of health care, child care, and food security. It would decimate access to benefit programs that provide economic security to vulnerable populations.

## HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

At the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, it would “immediately end the Biden Administration’s Property Appraisal and Valuation Equity (PAVE) policies,”<sup>34</sup> which were implemented after extensive reporting on explicit racism experienced by Black homeowners during

real estate appraisals. Project 2025 also proposes to “eliminate the new Housing Supply Fund” and “Repeal the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) regulation reinstated under the Biden Administration, and any other uses of special-purpose credit authorities to further equity.”<sup>35</sup>

## ELDER JUSTICE

In addition to health and economic security, home and community-based long-term services and supports are critical to Black women’s well-being as they age. Project 2025 would gut Medicaid home- and community-based services (HCBS) for older adults and disabled people of all ages, decreasing the quality of care and making it even more difficult for disabled people and older adults to access the care they need, care workers to earn a living wage, and family caregivers to receive support.<sup>36</sup>

## Education

**Reproductive Justice recognizes the importance of access to high-quality education that is free from discrimination.** Project 2025 is unsubtle in its approach. It proposes that, before being abolished, the Department of Education and all other federal agencies should stop enforcing disparate impact regulations that were enacted “to ensure that programs accepting federal money are not administered in a way that perpetuates the repercussions of past discrimination. As the U.S. Supreme Court has explained, even benignly-motivated policies that appear neutral on their face may be traceable to the nation’s long history of invidious race discrimination in employment, education, housing, and many other areas.”<sup>37</sup>

## PUBLIC EDUCATION

Project 2025’s ultimate goal is to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education and with it equity in public education. With the dubious argument that this is “for the sake of American children,” this policy would restrict federal education policy and oversight that was hard fought for under the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka*, outlawing racial segregation of children in public schools.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Project 2025 calls for “restoring law and order” by taking legal action against local prosecutors deemed to be ‘too soft’ on crime, increasing sentences, minimizing sentencing reductions, and increasing the use of the death penalty. It proposes aggressive use of RICO statutes and interstate drug prosecution, including for simple possession. Project 2025 also changes the focus of the Bureau of Justice Statistics to focus on “serious crimes committed, imprisonment, time served, recidivism, and the like.

## STUDENT LOAN DEBT

Recommendations in Project 2025 would rescind current regulations that address loan forgiveness. Yet, as noted in the announcement of those regulations in 2023, “The student debt burden... falls disproportionately on Black borrowers.”<sup>38</sup>

## COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION

Project 2025 calls for the abolishment of current “so-called evidence-based lists” of currently approved curriculum.<sup>39</sup> Similar dismissive and misleading language is applied to teen pregnancy prevention programs, stating that the programs should “... not serve as advocacy tools to promote sex, promote prostitution, or provide a funnel effect for abortion facilities and school field trips to clinics, or for similar purposes... Risk avoidance should be prioritized, and any program that submits a proposal that promotes risk rather than health should not be eligible for funding.”<sup>40</sup> This language and its impact on evidence-based curriculum, combined with broader attacks on reproductive health care and education evident throughout the document, would be severely detrimental to providing comprehensive sex education for Black girls and women.

## SCHOOL FUNDING

Project 2025 would rescind Title IX regulations, which would undermine protections for pregnant and parenting students, as well as LGBTQIA+ students, by redefining “sex” narrowly to mean only “biological sex recognized at birth.”<sup>41</sup>

## The Black Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda

In contrast to Project 2025, Reproductive Justice advocates have a better way to safeguard the rights and opportunities of Black women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals. In *Our Own Voice: National Black Women’s Reproductive Justice Agenda*, Interfaith Voices for Reproductive Justice, and SisterLove publishes the [Black Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda](#) for every new Congress. The *Agenda* is a blueprint for federal policymakers seeking to advance the Reproductive Justice framework. The *Agenda* seeks to build a future where *everyone* has bodily autonomy and access to the tools they need to thrive in order to improve outcomes for Black women, girls, and gender-expansive people.

With policy solutions for over two dozen pressing issues, the *Black Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda* is a hopeful and progressive guidepost for effective policies. The *Agenda* urges federal officials to ensure access to comprehensive, high-quality health care, including reproductive health care; prioritize student loan debt relief; pass a national paid leave program; make child tax credits permanent; robustly fund sexual assault prevention and research; address the root causes of police violence; and prioritize environmental justice in infrastructure funding and future investments, including increasing access to clean water.

The goals of Reproductive Justice, as articulated in the *Agenda*, stand in stark contrast to Project 2025’s economic *injustice*, which doubles down on harmful legislative proposals that have been defeated on a bipartisan basis in the past. Project 2025’s policies will have a gravely negative impact on Black Reproductive Justice in the US. The *Black Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda* is a stronger policy vision to create a future that allows us all to live safe, healthy, and equitable lives.

*Project 2025 doubles down on harmful legislative proposals that have been defeated on a bipartisan basis in the past. It would undo all of the progress our nation has made in advancing Reproductive Justice to date. This brief clearly illustrates how Project 2025 would impact Black Reproductive Justice and presents an alternative—and much preferable—policy vision for the future: The Black Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda.*

## Endnotes

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