

Written by Kathy

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Clevelandurbannews.com and Kathywrayco lemanonlinenewsblog.com

Staff article

CLEVELAND, Ohio-Women's March Cleveland and several other Black led Cleveland activist groups are complaining that a newly formed coalition of women's groups in Ohio dubbed Ohioans for Reproductive Freedom that is being led by the Ohio ACLU, Planned Parenthood Ohio and Pro Choice Ohio and is a statewide ballot initiative for the November 2023 ballot to seek to enshrine the legal right to an abortion in the Ohio Constitution does not include grassroots activist groups of Ohio and any Black led women's groups of Cleveland or Northeast Ohio.

These Black women's groups of Cleveland that community activists say were systematically excluded include Women's March Cleveland, the Laura Cowan Foundation, Black Women's PAC of Ohio and Greater Cleveland, Black Women's Army of Cleveland and the National Congress of Black Women Greater Cleveland Chapter

A second and small White group that was formed this past summer is competing with the aforementioned coalition for a possible ballot initiative on abortion, namely the Ohio Physicians for Reproductive Rights, and Black women doctors are not at the helm in their group, community activists say.

"That is ridiculous," said activist and domestic violence and reproductive rights advocate Laura Cowan, a CNN Hero who leads the Cleveland-based women's rights group the Laura Cowan

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Foundation. "Why are you not including Black women leaders and grassroots activists of Cleveland regarding reproductive rights and other women's rights that we have been fighting for and we as Black women are in the majority in Cleveland."

Women's March Cleveland said that groups like the Columbus-based Planned-Parenthood Ohio and Pro Choice Ohio that are exclusive and lack diversity in terms of key decision making create conflict and divisiveness in the women's movement and that a ballot initiative on abortion in Ohio is a difficult task even when supporters are unified across racial and ethnic lines.

"They will have to work hard to get voters to pass a ballot initiative in the red state of Ohio to enshrine the legal right to an abortion in the Ohio Constitution after Republicans, via the general election held in November, won every statewide office, including three seats up for grabs on the Ohio Supreme Court," said Kathy Wray Coleman, a Black Cleveland activist and local organizer who leads Women's March Cleveland, the largest women's rights group in Northeast Ohio. "And subordinating grassroots activists and Black women leaders in a majority Black major American city such as Cleveland will make it even harder. "

Alfred Porter Jr, president of Black on Black Crime Inc. and a community organizer who has helped Coleman organize women's marches in Cleveland for the last couple of years, said that "it is entirely unfair to leave out Black women leaders of Cleveland and Women's March Cleveland organizers and certainly unfair to kick off 2023 as if it were 1953 in terms of the treatment or mistreatment of Black women."

Coleman has led every major women's march in the city under the umbrella of Women's March Cleveland since 2018, including a march of some 2,500 people on Oct 2, 2021 at Market Square Park. She urges Ohio's mainstream media to investigate possible racism and White supremacy in the women's movement in Ohio as it relates to women of color, and Black women in particular, a problem, she says, that goes back decades, if not longer. She says that it is always difficult to get Pro Choice Ohio and Planned Parenthood of Ohio to embrace inclusiveness with respect to local Black women of Cleveland who fight against both sexism and racism. Also, says Coleman, Planned-Parenthood Ohio and Pro Choice Ohio, both of which are funded in part by government interests, often use Black women in secondary roles with their organizations to cover up the obvious prejudice and unfairness by their groups relative to Black women and other women of color.

"We offer an olive branch to these groups in terms of a coming together for all women in Ohio,

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whether its reproductive rights, Civil Rights, violence against women or racial equality issues," Coleman said. She added that the exclusive groups pushing the ballot initiative in Ohio to enshrine abortion into the constitution thus far can hardly get 20 people to a protest more less millions to back a ballot initiative on abortion.

"Women's March Cleveland," said Coleman "has been in the trenches on abortion access and reproductive and civil rights since the organization was established in 2017."

The U.S. Supreme Court, on June 24, 2022, reversed Roe v Wade in a case captioned Jackson vs Mississippi Health Organization and relegated the authority to either restrict or outlaw abortion to the respective state legislatures, though abortion is still currently legal in Ohio with limitations. Roe v Wade is the 1973 landmark Supreme Court decision that made abortion legal nationwide.

A state law that bans abortion after six weeks of pregnancy took effect in Ohio when Roe v Wade was overturned but is temporarily on hold per a court ruling by a Hamilton County judge. That new state law, commonly referred to as the heartbeat bill, makes abortion illegal in Ohio once a fetal heart beat is detected, which is as early as six weeks, opponents of the bill argue.

Ohio's GOP seasoned governor, Mike DeWine, a former U.S. senator and state attorney general, has vowed to do everything within his power to ensure that Ohio's Republican-dominated state legislature outlaws abortion in Ohio.

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We interviewed former president Barack Obama one-on-one when he was campaigning for president. As t

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o the Obama interview,

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