Last Updated: December 17, 2025

AN INITIATIVE OF
STATE INNOVATION EXCHANGE

Wastewater Bills

Anti-abortion groups have filed petitions and conservative legislators have introduced bills in state legislatures based on bogus and misleading information about mifepristone. They claim that mifepristone contaminates drinking water and harms wildlife, and are demanding the tracking of mifepristone and fetal tissue in water. They frame this as an environmental concern, but their focus on mifepristone is intended to create fear, and further stigmatize abortion and birth control as part of a pattern of targeting reproductive health care and limiting access to abortion medications.

The purpose of this brief is to raise awareness about this trending anti-abortion strategy of weaponizing environmental concerns and the language to look out for in bills introduced in your state legislature. Additionally, messaging is provided in this brief that can be used to combat these bills.

IN THIS BRIEF

BACKGROUND

Policy and Legal Landscape

Approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration over 25 years ago, medication abortion (aka abortion pills) is safe and effective, and the most common method of

ending a pregnancy in the United States– accounting for 63% of all abortions.[1] [2] The most common medication abortion regimen in the U.S. involves two medications– mifepristone and misoprostol. Mifepristone (also known by its generic name Mifeprex) is taken first (swallowed with water). This pill blocks progesterone, a hormone the body needs to keep a pregnancy going. Without progesterone the embryo stops growing and the lining of the uterus thins, making it hard for the embryo to remain implanted in the uterus. Then misoprostol is taken 24-48 hours later (it is usually dissolved under the tongue or inside the cheeks). These pills make the uterus contract, like it does during a period, miscarriage, or childbirth. These contractions help the body expel the pregnancy.

The large increase in medication abortion is largely due to the introduction of new virtual clinics in 2022 and 2023, which led to an increase in clinics offering abortion care in the U.S. Post-*Dobbs,* medication abortion accounts for the majority of abortions provided in most U.S. states without an abortion ban, and the availability of medication abortion via telehealth is a critical lifeline for those living in states with abortion bans– allowing abortion seekers who are navigating abortion access constraints to access care. Abortion seekers may choose medication via telemedicine because it is more affordable than in-clinic care or because they have limited ability and resources to travel to access abortion care.[3]

Anti-abortion politicians, judges, and interest groups have been relentless in their attempts to make medication abortion unavailable through federal regulations, litigation, and state policy. They are now claiming that mifepristone contaminates drinking water and harms wildlife, and are demanding that mifepristone and fetal tissue in water be tracked. They frame this as an environmental concern, but their real focus on mifepristone is to create fear, further stigmatize abortion and birth control, and limit, and eventually eliminate, access to abortion medications.

Students for Life, an anti-abortion group that has sought to mobilize young people for the anti-abortion cause, has claimed that trace amounts of mifepristone is poisoning wastewater in the U.S. In 2023, they filed a citizen petition urging the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to conduct an environmental study about mifepristone in the

[1] ANSIRH, Facts About Medication Abortion Care, 2 May 2025.
[2] The Guttmacher Institute, Medication Abortion Accounted for 63% of All US Abortions in 2023—An Increase from 53% in 2020, March 2024.
[3] The Guttmacher Institute, Medication Abortion Remains Critical to State Abortion Provision as Attacks on Access Persist, February 2025.

wastewater.[4] Students for Life claims that the large number of people using abortion medications and flushing fetal remains down the toilet poses an environmental risk to humans, wildlife, and livestock, and has asked the FDA to revoke its approval of mifepristone.[5]

Additionally, some states are starting to adopt the Clean Water for All Life Act from Students For Life and various bills were introduced in 2025 that weaponize environmental laws to target and restrict abortion medications. According to Students for Life, the premise of the Clean Water for All Life Act is to "ensure water quality & hold chemical abortion pill producers accountable" for the potential environmental impact of abortion water pollution. Bills introduced in five states, Maine, Montana, Texas, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, would force those states to test for mifepristone and hormones associated with abortion and contraception at wastewater facilities, make manufacturers responsible for proper disposal of "abortion drugs," and/or allow private citizens to sue anyone who helped another person get abortion pills, including the drug manufacturer. If any bills like these pass in the future, these laws could be so burdensome that it could cut off access to abortion medications.

There is no scientifically sound evidence to prove that trace amounts of mifepristone in wastewater are harming people, animals, or ecosystems. Current scientific consensus indicates that the levels of any single drug that might enter the water supply through human excretion is present at low concentrations, and most wastewater treatment systems include processes to separate solid waste from liquid and mifepristone tends to stick to solid waste. The FDA itself has stated that there is no evidence that bodily fluid from people who have used mifepristone causes harm to the nation's aquatic environment.[6] Additionally, environmental scientists have said that there is no evidence that mifepristone is harming people, animals, or the environment.[7]

---

[4] For more information on these claims please see, PolitiFact's "Anti-abortion advocates turn to the environment: Is mifepristone in wastewater a threat?"
[5] Students for Life, "Citizen Petition," 19 April 2023.
[6] U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Final response from FDA CDER to Students for Life of America, 15 January 2025.
[7] Ariel Wittenberg and Alice Miranda Ollstein, "Using the devil's own tools against them': Abortion opponents turn to environmental laws," *Politico*, 30 January 2025.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The example bills and initiatives below are a reference to be used within a collaborative governance model in order to secure and sustain meaningful racial, social, and economic justice outcomes. We invite values-aligned state legislators to partner with issue advocates and grassroots leaders. Together, they can commit to centering the people most impacted by systemic and structural oppression to transform the conditions of power at the state level.

Messaging on Environmental/Mifepristone in Wastewater Messages (courtesy of the EMAA Project)

Values Statements:

- We can all agree clean drinking water is essential for public health and the environment.
- Addressing pharmaceutical presence in wastewater requires an evidence-based, holistic approach that looks at all medications in wastewater, rather than singling out specific ones used in early abortion care or miscarriage management.

Mifepristone and Other Pharmaceuticals in Water:

- There is no scientifically sound evidence to prove that trace amounts of mifepristone in wastewater are harming people, animals, or the ecosystems.
- These bogus claims calling out mifepristone aim to stigmatize abortion as part of a pattern targeting reproductive care —not genuinely protecting water safety.
- While mifepristone's half-life (18-25 hours) is a little longer than some other medicines, active ingredients in common medications taken daily, like fluoxetine (used in Prozac) and warfarin (to treat blood clots) have half-lives that can last up to several days.
- As with most drug approvals, the FDA conducted an environmental assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for mifepristone. After review, the FDA concluded that its approval would not significantly impact the environment.
- All medications, when excreted through the body, can leave trace amounts in wastewater, including over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen, life-saving treatments like beta blockers, and everyday medications like birth control.

- Singling out mifepristone is a misleading and stigmatizing ploy by our opponents to ban a medication used for early abortion care or early pregnancy loss.
- Current scientific consensus indicates that the levels of any single drug that might enter the water supply through human excretion is present at low concentrations.
    - Current research shows trace amounts of most medications in wastewater, but modern wastewater systems already reduce much of this. For most pharmaceuticals, the remaining levels in drinking water are extremely low and not harmful to humans.
- Medical waste tissue from an early abortion is no different than tissue from an early pregnancy loss or even a regular period.

Call to Action:

- These bogus claims calling out mifepristone aim to stigmatize abortion as part of a pattern targeting reproductive care and healthcare—not genuinely protecting water safety.
    - As with any drug approval, the FDA adhered to the requirements the agency must follow under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
    - When mifepristone was approved, the agency concluded that "the product can be manufactured, used and disposed of without any expected adverse environmental effects."
- This effort to weaponize mifepristone in wastewater is political and would do nothing to improve clean water. If we're serious about protecting drinking water, we need comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to improve wastewater treatment and ensure access to clean water rather than politicizing one specific medication.

STATE POLICY THREATS

Various bills were introduced in 2025 that weaponize environmental laws to target and, eventually, restrict abortion medications. These bills would force states to test for mifepristone and hormones associated with contraception at waste water facilities. Some states are also starting to adopt the Clean Water for All Life Act from Students For Life. Anti-abortion groups frame this as an environmental concern, but their focus on mifepristone is intended to create fear, and further stigmatize abortion and birth control as part of a pattern of targeting reproductive health care and limiting access to abortion medications. We believe that there will be similar bills introduced in many states in 2026. Below are some examples.

- **Maine** House Bill 887 would make manufacturers responsible for proper disposal of "abortion drugs" and require a health care provider to be physically present during a "chemical abortion." (Status: Dead, 06/10/25)
- **Montana** Senate Bill 479 would establish manufacturer responsibility for the proper disposal of "abortion drugs" and remediation of tainted wastewater systems. (Status: Died in Process, 05/23/25)
- **Pennsylvania** House Bill 1845 ("An Act amending the act of May 1, 1984 (P.L.206, No.43), known as the Pennsylvania Safe Drinking Water Act, further providing for definitions and for public nuisances") states that no person shall cause an "abortion drug" to enter wastewater or public water supply, public water system or the waters of this Commonwealth, and would establish manufacturer responsibility for the liable for the cleanup, remediation and any further preventative measures if an "abortion drug" is found in wastewater, a public water system, public water supply, or the waters of the Commonwealth. (Status: Referred to Health, 9/9/25)
- **Texas** Senate Bill 1976 ("Relating to certain testing requirements at certain wastewater treatment facilities") would force testing for mIfepristone and hormones associated with contraception at waste water facilities. Under the bill, private citizens would also be able to sue anyone who helped another person get abortion pills–including the drug manufacturer–for up to $100,000. (Status: Left pending in committee, 4/14/25)
- **West Virginia** Senate Bill 97 ("the West Virginia Chemical Abortion Prohibition Act") would regulate how pharmaceutical manufacturers dispose of "abortion drugs," and, if "abortion drugs" are found in wastewater, the manufacturer would be responsible for cleanup, remediation, and further preventative measures. A violation would be punishable by a fine of $20,000 per violation. (Status: Sent to Health and Human Resources, 2/12/25)
- **Wisconsin** Assembly Bill 718 ("relating to: prescription, use, and disposal of abortion-inducing drugs and providing a penalty") The bill provides that the manufacturer of any "abortion-inducing drug" is responsible for proper disposal of the "abortion-inducing drugs" and mitigation of any release of an endocrine disruptor caused by the improper disposal of "abortion- inducing drugs," including from the disposal of pathological waste. (Status: Introduced by Representatives Brill, Gustafson, Behnke, Knodl, Kreibich, Murphy and Wichgers; cosponsored by Senator Jacque, 12/3/25)
- **Wyoming** House Bill 0159 ("Protecting water from chemical abortion waste.") would specify requirements for manufacturers of "chemical abortion drugs" and environmental and disposal requirements for" abortion drugs." (Status: H Did not consider for COW– Committee of the Whole–, 02/10/2025)

RESOURCES

- Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH) Facts about Medication Abortion Care
- Expanding Medication Abortion Access Project (EMAA): The Safety of Medication Abortion Care
- Mife In All 50
- Weaponizing Water: How the Campaign Against Medication Abortion Co-opts Environmental Policy (Guttmacher Institute)

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Please contact the State Innovation Exchange (SIX) Reproductive Rights team at reproductiverights@stateinnovation.org with questions or requests for more information.