

A Trend in the Right Direction

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

By Deirdre A. McQuade

The number of abortions is declining almost everywhere in the United States. According to an Associated Press (AP) survey using the most recent figures available, the sheer number of surgical abortions nationwide dropped 12% since 2010. This trend, though much-discussed, is actually nothing new. Abortions have been declining for 25 years.

What's behind the welcome news?

Many may assume there are fewer abortions because there are fewer pregnancies. But the rate of unintended pregnancies has remained rather constant. Easy access to contraception has not had a noticeable impact on the pregnancy rate. Contraception is not – and [has never been](#) – a reliable way to reduce abortions.

Are more pregnancies being carried to birth? The AP survey doesn't provide parallel data on birth rates in states where abortions went down. But it's certainly hard these days to deny the reality of the unborn human being. Ultrasounds, posted on social media as well as on refrigerators in many households, now provide a window to the womb. Those who were pregnant in the 1970's and 80's could more readily buy into the lie that their "products of conception" were just a "blob of tissue." For some time now, the child in utero – often named before birth – has had a claim on our empathy in a way that was not common before.

The pregnancy assistance movement is also strong. Pregnancy help centers and maternity homes in this country outnumber abortion clinics three to one, offering free, confidential assistance to women and their families in need. The kind staff and volunteers who provide women with emotional support and material resources offer them the freedom to choose life for their children.

Since declines were measured both in states where pro-life laws have gone into effect and in states that have more permissive laws, the AP story claimed that pro-life laws have no effect on

abortion rates. This is a misleading conclusion. We know from many analyses that laws limiting abortion funding, and those providing for informed consent for women and parental involvement for minors, help bring down abortion rates in the states that enact them. There can be a delay in their impact as the laws take effect, but then the impact is noticeable and long-term. Laws enacted more recently may not yet have had their effect, while older pro-life laws made their initial impact well before the time scope of this survey. And the states without pro-life laws that saw reduced abortion rates still often have much higher rates than states with such laws. The AP reporter's assessment is based on a flat-footed understanding of how law helps change the culture.

Of course, since each human life is of immeasurable value, one abortion is one too many – wherever it takes place in the world, by whatever means, and for whatever reason. We will not rest in our pro-life advocacy until abortion is a sad and distant memory.

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