

YWCA Northcentral PA
Op-Ed For Williamsport Sun Gazette
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Upholding Reproductive and Sexual Health Options for Victims and Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault



Northcentral PA

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The YWCA Northcentral PA believes in every person's right to bodily autonomy and the ability to decide what is best for their lives. Since 1977, YWCA Northcentral PA has operated Wise Options, a comprehensive victim service center supporting victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other violent crimes as they escape abuse and rebuild their lives. The YWCA works to uphold consent, the right to privacy, and bodily autonomy as fundamental rights no person, law, or government should violate.

With one-third of women impacted by domestic violence and one in five being a victim of rape, access to reproductive and sexual healthcare is essential to regain control of one's life. Perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual assault often maintain power within their relationships by undermining their partners' economic security, health, safety, and autonomy to make reproductive and sexual health decisions.

Coercive control and reproductive coercion are tactics used regularly in domestic violence situations. Abusers use tactics such as contraceptive sabotage, forcing sexual contact, inflicting harm with the intent of a miscarriage, and even forcing a pregnant person to make unwanted choices regarding the outcome of the pregnancy. Victims often risk being trapped in violent relationships if they cannot access safe abortion care. This entrapment can lead to heightened abuse during pregnancy or the abuser killing the victim.

A critical component of finding safety and healing after being victimized by domestic violence or sexual assault is the autonomy to decide what emergency contraceptives or pregnancy terminations are appropriate for oneself. The YWCA Northcentral PA stands with the clients served through Wise Options as they navigate those paths, as these options are necessary for survivors to live independent lives free of abuse.

**The YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women
and promoting peace, justice, freedom & dignity for all.**



Lycoming County United Way

The YWCA is a program partner of the Lycoming County United Way.



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As the nation’s largest network of domestic abuse and sexual assault service providers, YWCAs across the Nation are deeply concerned about the implications in the context of well-documented links between access to abortion and intimate partner violence as a result of the decision made by the Supreme Court of the United States on June 24, 2022.

The consequences of coercive control on reproductive and sexual health can be less detrimental if people have access to safe and legal pregnancy termination measures.

Privacy is a fundamental right for survivors seeking safety. The YWCA Northcentral PA is here to provide this protection, ensuring individuals seeking services feel they have a place to turn.

Women of color are more likely to suffer from intimate partner violence than their white counterparts; black women face a maternal health crisis that leaves them at four times greater risk of dying due to a pregnancy-related death. Moreover, unintended pregnancies that result from reproductive coercion and contraception sabotage by intimate partners are palpable dangers in the context of domestic violence. While not all victims of violence seek abortion care, the ability to have an abortion – or not – can have dire impacts.

Building on these basic tenants of personal liberty, the YWCA Northcentral PA supports actions and policies that prevent domestic abuse, sexual assault, and other violent crimes and invest in the health and safety of all. We advocate for individuals impacted by domestic violence, sexual assault, and other violent crimes to live free from the threat of being criminalized for making decisions about one’s health, life, and family. We advocate for strengthening the systems that support individuals and families so that every person has the opportunity to live safe, healthy, and stable lives free from violence.

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