

Amber Thurman First Named 'Preventable' Abortion Death Since Bans

Published Sep 17, 2024 at 7:25 AM EDT

Updated Sep 17, 2024 at 11:36 AM EDT

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A Georgia woman died after not receiving timely medical care due to the state's restrictive abortion law, investigative journalism site [ProPublica](#) reports.



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Amber Nicole Thurman, 28, experienced a rare complication after taking abortion pills and died during emergency surgery in August 2022, according to medical reports obtained by the site.

Newsweek has contacted the hospital where she died for comment via email.

ProPublica said the case marks the first incident of an abortion-related death that an official state committee deemed "preventable" has been made public. It said it will soon publish details of a second case.

Georgia law banning most abortions after about six weeks of pregnancy, labeled the LIFE Act, took effect on July 20, 2022. Thurman's pregnancy had recently passed that mark when she discovered she was pregnant, records shared with ProPublica showed.

The new law also made performing a dilation and curettage (D&C), a procedure to remove tissue from the uterus following an abortion or miscarriage, a felony offense with medical exceptions—but doctors had warned the law's language is too vague.



Amber Nicole Thurman (pictured) died after she did not receive timely medical care due to the state's restrictive abortion law, ProPublica reports.

Thurman discovered she was pregnant with twins in the summer of 2022, soon after the U.S. [Supreme Court](#) overturned *Roe v. Wade*, [prompting bans and restrictions on abortions](#) in now 22 states.

The otherwise healthy medical assistant and single mother to a 6-year-old boy made the decision to terminate to preserve her family stability, according to her best friend Ricaria Baker. She had moved out of her family's home into a gated apartment complex and had plans to enroll in nursing school.

Thurman had wanted a surgical abortion in her home state and hoped Georgia's ban would be paused in court, but at nine weeks she sought care at a clinic in North Carolina.

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On the day of her appointment, Baker said they hit traffic and the clinic could not hold her spot for longer than 15 minutes. Instead, Thurman was given a medication abortion with mifepristone and misoprostol, a regimen approved by the U.S Food and Drug Administration ([FDA](#)).

[Abortion using medication is the most common way](#) to end a pregnancy in the U.S., and deaths from complications are extremely rare—only 32 deaths were reported to the FDA through 2022 out of almost 6 million who have used mifepristone to terminate a pregnancy, regardless of whether the drug played a role.



Protesters march in downtown Atlanta in opposition to Georgia's new abortion law on July 23, 2022. **MEGAN VARNER/GETTY IMAGES**

After taking the pills, Thurman experienced cramping, but her condition worsened over several days with vomiting and heavy bleeding, according to the report.

She was transported to Piedmont Henry Hospital in Stockbridge, Georgia, on the evening of August 18, where doctors discovered she had not expelled all the fetal tissue from her body.

She was diagnosed with "acute severe sepsis" the following morning, but even then, a D&C was not done. ProPublica reported that doctors continued to gather information and dispense medicine instead of performing the procedure even as Thurman was breathing rapidly and at risk of bleeding out.

At 12:05 p.m. that day, more than 17 hours after Thurman arrived at the hospital, a doctor who specializes in intensive care notified the OB-GYN that her condition was deteriorating. She was taken to an operating room two hours later.

By that stage, the situation was so dire it required open abdominal surgery. The doctor performed the D&C and found a hysterectomy was also required. During the procedure, Thurman's heart stopped.

Georgia's maternal mortality review committee, which includes 10 doctors, concluded that there was a "good chance" that Thurman's death could likely have been prevented if the D&C had been provided earlier.

While official reviews of individual patient cases are not made public, ProPublica said it had obtained reports confirming at least one other woman had died after being unable to access legal abortions and timely medical

A judge in Atlanta later blocked Georgia's updated abortion law, but the state's supreme court ruled in 2023 that it could remain. The law allows abortion up to 20 weeks of pregnancy in cases of rape and incest and if one is necessary to prevent a patient's death or substantial physical impairment of a major bodily function.

Kamala Harris: 'Exactly What We Feared'

Twenty-two states have banned or restricted abortion since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in June 2022. Since then, voters in seven states—California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, Ohio and Vermont—siding with abortion rights supporters on ballot measures.

Vice President [Kamala Harris](#), who is campaigning on defending abortion rights, responded to ProPublica's report, saying Thurman's case "was exactly what we feared when Roe was struck down" and blamed her opponent, former President [Donald Trump](#).

"This young mother should be alive, raising her son, and pursuing her dream of attending nursing school," she said.

"In more than 20 states, Trump Abortion Bans are preventing doctors from providing basic medical care. Women are bleeding out in parking lots, turned away from emergency rooms, losing their ability to ever have children again. Survivors of rape and incest are being told they cannot make decisions about what happens next to their bodies. And now women are dying. These are the consequences of Donald Trump's actions."

Harris said she wants to pass legislation to "restore reproductive freedom," while saying that Trump wants a national abortion ban. She warned "these horrific realities will multiply" if he wins the presidential election in November.

Trump announced in April that he wants abortion rights legislation left to individual states.

Reproductive rights groups also expressed outrage after ProPublica's report was published on Monday.

"Amber would be alive right now if it wasn't for Donald Trump & [Georgia Governor] [Brian Kemp](#)'s abortion ban," Mini Timmaraju, president of Reproductive Freedom for All, wrote on X. "They have blood on their hands."

Pregnancy Justice wrote on X: "This is absolutely devastating. Amber Thurman waited 20 hours for doctors to finally operate on her spreading infection, sinking blood pressure, and failing organs. By then, it was too late. If she had access to timely care, she would still be here. Abortion bans kill people."

Garrison Douglas, a spokesperson for Kemp, said in a statement to *Newsweek*: "It is self-evident that dangerous misinformation places patients' lives at risk, which is why getting the facts right is vitally important."

"Georgia's LIFE Act not only expanded support for expectant mothers but also established clear exceptions, including providing necessary care in the event of a medical emergency. In Georgia, we will always fight for and protect the lives of the most vulnerable among us."

Update 9/17/24, 8:45 a.m. ET: A statement from Kamala Harris has been added.

Update 9/17/24, 9:25 a.m. ET: A statement from Garrison Douglas has been added.