

# Resolution 48: Clarifying Cornell's Position on Medication Abortion Prescription Drugs at Cornell

**Abstract:** In light of New York State requiring SUNY campuses to take steps to make medicated abortion (abortion pills) available in A1395-C/S1213-B, the Student Assembly suggests Cornell University adopt the same provisions as university policy.

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**Reviewed by:** Late Addition, 05/04/2023

**Type of Action:** Recommendation

**Originally Presented:** 05/04/2023

**Current Status:** New Business

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**Whereas,** Cornell University is home to a diverse students population with differing degrees of legal protections to their own bodily autonomy, coming from home states that can, have, and shamefully will likely continue to exclude access to reproductive health care;

**Whereas,** Cornell University, within the bounds of our New York State campus, can be an institution on the right side of history, empowering the fundamental freedom of medical privacy, and right over one's bodily autonomy to all of its students;

**Whereas,** on September 13, 2021, Governor Kathy Hochul announced “an agenda to affirm abortion rights and cement New York's status as a place to welcome women seeking abortion care”<sup>1</sup> in recognition that “anti-choice extremists and judges continue to roll back abortion rights across the country”<sup>2</sup>

**Whereas,** the Cornell Student Assembly has long shown strong and clear support for preserving reproductive rights and health access for all members of the Cornell community, including as recently as last Student Assembly body with Resolution: SA R23: Support for Reproductive 32 Rights adopted unanimously on September 9, 2021 (09/09/2021) specifically calling on “Cornell University to invest more effort into educating the student body on methods of birth control and pregnancy termination services available through Cornell Health and within the greater Ithaca area to empower students with independent control over their own bodies and lives”, and again in this Student Assembly body with Resolution: SA R20: Dependable and Inclusive Supply of Pharmaceutical and Essential Nonprescription Supplies adopted unanimously on February 9, 2023 (02/09/2023);

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-agenda-affirm-abortion-rights-new-york-stands-senator-gillibrand>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.suny.edu/suny-news/press-releases/5-23/5-2-23/reproductive-health.html>

**Whereas**, after the passing of R:23 President Pollack offered in her letter of acknowledgment that “Cornell Health offers contraception counseling and options, including prescription and non-prescription birth control available in the Cornell Health pharmacy, plus comprehensive sexual health education materials on their website. Students can also receive pregnancy testing at Cornell Health. Those seeking pregnancy options counseling and / or services – for continuation of pregnancy, adoption, or abortion – are referred to local and regional organizations for care,” making clear that access to abortion care, at the time of writing, is currently outsourced to external local and regional healthcare operations;

**Whereas**, Cornell Health’s website currently expresses support for the right to choose saying “Cornell Health reaffirms our commitment to supporting the sexual health and reproductive choices of every student who comes to us for care”, with Cornell Health staff members currently providing “confidential sexual health care available to all students, including preventive and emergency contraception, pregnancy testing, and referrals to support the continuation or end of pregnancy;”<sup>3</sup>

**Whereas**, Currently Cornell Health, in an online PDF resource describes pregnancy termination care in a advisory and consultative role, sharing that “staff can provide education about your options, based on how far your pregnancy has progressed, and help you manage the logistics of scheduling a procedure in Ithaca or at another location of choice. If desired (before and/or after termination), we can help you connect with counseling support on campus or in the community”<sup>4</sup>;

**Whereas**, Section IX (M) of the Student Health Plan 2021-2022 Certificate of Coverage, specifies, “We, [Cornell University], Cover medically necessary abortions including abortions in cases of rape, incest or fetal malformation. We Cover elective abortions;”<sup>5</sup>

**Whereas**, Cornell University simply does not offer access to abortion care on campus outside of an advisory and consultative role;

**Whereas**, unplanned and unexpected pregnancy can place a significant burden on students' lives, and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy published a study finding as high as 61 percent of pregnant female students dropped out of their academic program.<sup>6</sup>

**Whereas**, New York Governor Kathy Hochul, a member of the Board of Trustees of Cornell University, signed (A1395-C/S1213-B) into law on May, 2023, which amends Section 6438-b of the Education Law to provide that,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://health.cornell.edu/about/news/we-respect-your-choices>

<sup>4</sup> <https://health.cornell.edu/sites/health/files/pdf-library/pregnancy-options.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://studenthealthbenefits.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/2022-01/SHP\\_%2021\\_22\\_COC.pdf](https://studenthealthbenefits.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/2022-01/SHP_%2021_22_COC.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.communitycollegereview.com/blog/is-contraception-the-answer-for-college-completionrates#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20report%20by,end%20up%20finishing%20their%20degrees>

*Every campus of the state university of New York and every campus of the city university of New York shall provide access to medication abortion to all students enrolled at such institutions by either:*

*(a) employing or contracting with individuals authorized to prescribe medication abortion prescription drugs within their lawful scope of practice pursuant to title eight of this chapter; or*

*(b) providing students with information and referrals to providers authorized to prescribe medication abortion prescription drugs within their lawful scope of practice pursuant to title eight of this chapter.<sup>7</sup>*

**Whereas,** Under this statute, the State University of New York (SUNY) is required to provide access to medicated abortion (abortion pills) to all students enrolled at such institutions by August 1, 2023;

**Whereas,** According to the State University of New York: Complete Campus List featured on the State University of New York website, Cornell University occupies a unique position within the SUNY system, as “the land-grant university for New York State” with “four contract colleges and schools that were created by an Act of the New York State Legislature”, NYS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, NYS College of Veterinary Medicine, NYS College of Human Ecology, and NYS School of Industrial and Labor Relations, that are “connected to The State University of New York” to which “the state contributes a portion of the operating expenses of the contract colleges”<sup>8</sup>

**Whereas,** Section 6438-b creates new statutory language that broadly constructs the definition of campus, making no intentional decision between the campuses operated by SUNY and the four contract colleges operated by Cornell University;

**Whereas,** According to a Cornell Health Termination of Pregnancy Resource Document (<https://health.cornell.edu/node/25321>), medicated abortion (abortion pill) along with other pregnancy termination resources are available only at the “Local abortion providers” including “Planned Parenthood: Ithaca Health Center,” which is over a thirty (30) minute walk from Ho Plaza and over an hour walk from North Campus, which is indisputably inaccessible for most students;

**Be in therefore resolved,** Cornell University continues its commitment to protecting reproductive rights and the right over one’s bodily autonomy in the face of the ongoing generational assault and systematic oppression;

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<sup>7</sup> <https://legislation.nysenate.gov/pdf/bills/2023/A1395C>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.suny.edu/campuses/cornell/#:~:text=Cornell%20University%20is%20the%20land,the%20New%20York%20State%20Legislature>

**Be it further resolved,** due to the legal ambiguity and the ongoing necessity within our community for safe and accessible abortion care, it is in the interest of the University to be compliant with the new statutory requirements;

**Be it finally resolved,** the Student Assembly recommends the University comply with the provisions of Section 6438-b of the Education Law and ensure ongoing access to medicated abortion (abortion pill) within the reaches of Cornell University;

**Respectfully Submitted,**

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