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Gov. Whitmer joins governors calling on Congress to protect access to abortion

LANSING, Mich. — After a draft opinion from the U.S. Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade* leaked this month, Governor Gretchen Whitmer joined 16 governors to call on the United States Senate to make legal protections in *Roe* into law. Last month, Governor Whitmer filed a lawsuit and used her executive authority to ask the Michigan Supreme Court to immediately resolve whether Michigan's Constitution protects the right to abortion.

"Today, I am proud to join my fellow governors and call on Congress to immediately put the protections offered by *Roe v. Wade* into federal law," said Governor Whitmer. "In September, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Women's Health Protection Act, which would make access to abortion as protected by *Roe* into law. We urge the United States Senate to come together and get this done. This legislation is critical because we are seeing in real-time that legal precedent, no matter how old, is not permanent.

"We must act at the state and federal level to protect the right to legal abortion. That's why last month, I filed a lawsuit and used my executive authority to urge the Michigan Supreme Court to immediately resolve whether Michigan's state constitution protects the right to abortion. Because if *Roe* is officially overturned by the Supreme Court—which may happen any day now—abortion could become illegal in Michigan in nearly any circumstance, including in cases of rape and incest, because of a 1931 law on the books banning abortion in Michigan. We must protect the nearly 2.2 million women in Michigan and the tens of millions of American women who would lose the right to make decisions about their

bodies. The words 'Roe overturned' are no longer theoretical. We are going to fight like hell to protect access to safe, legal abortion."

A group of 17 governors came together to urge the United States Senate to pass the Women's Health Protection Act, which would put the protections offered by *Roe* into federal law. Since the overturn of *Roe* may come any day, we must act immediately to protect access to safe, legal abortion at the state and federal level. Governor Whitmer has filed suit with the Michigan Supreme Court urging them to identify if the state's constitution includes the right to an abortion and has signed onto today's letter asking lawmakers in DC to codify safe, legal abortion into federal law too.

The governor's legal action represents the first time a governor has filed a lawsuit to protect a woman's right to abortion since the U.S. Supreme Court signaled its willingness to consider overturning or circumscribing the federal right to an abortion.

The lawsuit asks the court to recognize a constitutional right to an abortion under the Due Process Clause of the Michigan Constitution. It also asks the court to stop enforcement of the 1931 Michigan abortion ban. The abortion ban violates Michigan's due process clause, which provides a right to privacy and bodily autonomy that is violated by the state's near-total criminal ban of abortion. It also violates Michigan's Equal Protection Clause due to the way the ban denies women equal rights because the law was adopted to reinforce antiquated notions of the proper role for women in society.

President Biden announces clemency and pardons for 78 people, details steps for criminal justice reform

By Stacy M. Brown,
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President Joe Biden announced he's using his clemency powers for the first time, issuing commutations for 75 drug offenders.

Biden also issued three pardons, including the first Black Secret Service agent to work on a presidential detail, who had long professed his innocence.

"Helping those who served their time return to their families and become contributing members of their communities is one of the most effective ways to reduce recidivism and decrease crime," Biden stated.

The president added that those receiving clemency had "demonstrated their commitment to rehabilitation and are striving every day to give back and contribute to their communities."

The clemency recipients include Abraham Bolden, an 86-year-old former U.S. Secret Service agent and the first African American to serve on a presidential detail.

In 1964, officials charged Bolden with attempting to sell a Secret Service file.

His first trial resulted in a hung jury.

Following his conviction at a second trial, even though crucial witnesses against him admitted to lying at the prosecutor's request, the court denied Bolden a new trial.

He has maintained his innocence, arguing that he was targeted for prosecution in retaliation for exposing unprofessional and racist behavior within the U.S. Secret Service.

Bolden has received numerous honors and awards for his ongoing work to speak out against the racism he faced in the Secret Service in the 1960s and his courage in challenging injustice.

Betty Jo Bogans also counted among those cleared by Biden.

A jury convicted the 51-year-old in 1998 for possession with intent to distribute crack cocaine in the Southern District of Texas.

Authorities said she attempted to transport drugs for her boyfriend and his accomplice, neither of whom were detained or arrested.

At the time of her conviction, the White House said Bogans was a single mother with no prior record who accepted responsibility for her limited role in the offense.

"Because of the harsh penalties in place at the time she was convicted, Ms. Bogan received a seven-year sentence," the White House said in a statement.

In the nearly two decades since her release from custody, Bogans has held consistent employment, even while undergoing treatment for cancer, and has focused on raising her son.

Administration officials signaled that the president would no longer wait on Congress for needed criminal justice reform.

Biden announced a \$145 million plan to provide job skills training to federal inmates to help them gain work when they are released.

He added the implementation of new steps to support those re-entering society after incarceration.

Those steps include a new collaboration between the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Labor to provide job training; new grants for workforce development programs; greater opportunities to serve in the federal government; expanded access to capital for people with convictions trying to start a small business; improved reentry services for veterans; and more support for health care, housing, and educational opportunities.

"As I laid out in my comprehensive strategy to reduce gun crime, helping those who served their time return to their families and become contributing members of their communities is one of the most effective ways to reduce recidivism and decrease crime," Biden remarked.

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birth name of boxing icon Muhammad Ali. "He's rough and tough. He's always ready to fight and get his way."

All five boys live with her in a three-bedroom house in Eastman, Georgia, with their grandmother and grandfather, Curtis Hamilton. Curtis Hamilton who holds the distinction of being the first Black National Guardsman in Eastman.

They have been reunited with brother and mother's oldest child, Camarian, 14, who has been living there for the past three years.

Each is unique yet bound together by a common emotional scar. They share a pain and a deep fear left by COVID-19.

The signs are subtle, their grandmother said. For example, if one of them gets a cold or has the sniffles, they are quick to tell her, so she can immediately take preventive measure, or they will ask her for medicine, she said.

"They panic a little when anyone gets sick," Hamilton said. "When their uncle got COVID, they were distraught. They thought COVID was a death sentence for everyone."

To them, it is.

It's the reason Kingston asked his grandmother one day, "Did my dad get his shot? If he did, would he still be living?"

It was Aug. 8, 2021, when their father, Ken Williams, a manager for a fast food restaurant in Warner Robbins, Georgia, was diagnosed with COVID-19.

Their mother, Courtney Hamilton, had died three years earlier in an automobile accident in Perry, Georgia. She was 27.

"It was a huge shock for all of us," Carla said of her death. "You always think you have to be strong for the kids, but really, they were so strong for us."

The couple had never married. Their relationship, family members said, was off-and-on.

After their mother's death, their grandmother and their Aunt Carla moved in temporarily to help take care of them.

They stayed together five months until the father moved out with the boys and continued to move, five times in three years, the family said. Sometimes the boys stayed with relatives, sometimes with his girlfriend.

Still, their father set the rules and the tone, the family said. He was their primary caregiver, but more than anything, he was their father, a man who was consistently in their lives.

The kids were living with Williams' girlfriend when he was diagnosed. The children were quickly quarantined away from their father and kept out of school, though they didn't know exactly why at the time, their grandmother said.

Williams entered the hospital Aug. 20 in Warner-Robbins. Three days later, he was dead. He was 37.

"They were devastated," their grandmother said. "For the past three years, he was the sole provider for them."

The next time the five saw their father was at his wake before his cremation. He was in a casket alongside another casket that held his 57-year-old father, Kenneth Williams, who had died a day earlier of unrelated causes.

With Williams' death, his sons joined tens of thousands of children in the U.S. who have experienced the loss of one or both parents to the COVID-19. According to a new modeling study published in *Pediatrics*, a child loses a parent or guardian in one of every four COVID-19 deaths, a devastating consequence that is affecting the lives of an estimated 140,000 children.

After their father's death, their grandmother and their aunt scurried to gather

all the documents related to children - school, medical and birth records -- and the boys moved into Carla Hamilton's four-bedroom house with her five children in Snellville.

The property owner, however, said their presence was a violation of Hamilton's lease. The children were forced to move again, this time with their grandmother, who had been keeping Camarian Hamilton, since his mother's death.

These days, the four oldest boys are enrolled in South Dodge Elementary School, and Kassius is in pre-kindergarten, his grandmother said. Camarian, attends Dodge County High School.

Having responsibility for the care and feeding of five boys thrust upon them at the age most people retire would be considered a burden by many, but not the boys' grandmother.

"I'm loving every minute of it," Hamilton said.

"Having all of them in the house really gives me a good purpose for living. I never realized how much I stayed in the house and did nothing but watch TV. But with them here, there's something to do constantly."

The boys seem to like it too, according to "The Enforcer."

"I think it's good [living with Granny]," Kingston said. "I like living down here. I like my new school. I like that most of my family lives here, and we get to see Cam and our cousins."

"I do my chores. I help my grandma and Pop Pop. I help with Kassius and Kobe. I just like being helpful."

Their aunt said she has seen a change in the five.

"There's a feeling of relief," she said. "They're settled. They're calm. They're finally stable, and they know they're not going anywhere."

Outwardly, the boys seem fine, Betty Hamilton said. She has noticed, however, they don't talk much about their parents unless it's among each other.

Their grandmother said, the boys put her on notice they want vaccinations as soon as possible.

"They want the shots," she said. "They let me know that. They don't have them yet, but as soon as I can find out where they can get them, I'll get them."

She has enrolled them in counseling.

"Everybody grieves differently," she said. "This is the first week. The counselor will meet them on a one-on-one basis. I wanted them to be able to talk and not be scared something is going to happen to me."

"I want them to be kids and not have to worry about things like that."

Every year on their mother's birthday, the boys release six purple balloons—her favorite color—at her gravesite in Chauncey, Georgia, 15 miles from their home., their grandmother said. This year, a month after Williams' passing the boys asked if they could get six red balloons in his honor and release them all together.

While chatting among themselves, Kingston said, "Well, my mom got a big old birthday present today!"

He was asked if he was talking about the balloons.

"No," he said. "I'm talking about my dad. They're together in heaven."

Even on the days when the boys ask tough questions, like every time they hear anything on the news about COVID-19, or have the occasional nightmare, they appear to be at peace, their family said.

"All six of them are together again, and I think that's how my daughter and Ken would have liked it," their grandmother said. "I think they're happy, because they know this is where they'll be from now on."

