

Don't Wait to Graduate! How Law Students Can Help Young Folks Access Abortion Care

Welcome to Judicial Bypass Week (<https://www.ifwhenhow.org/news/?t=159>) at If/When/How! We're highlighting the excellent work of attorneys, advocates, academics, and youth around the country who are working to make mandatory parental involvement laws a thing of the past, ensuring that young people who can't, or can't safely, involve their parents in their abortion decisions are able to access the care they need swiftly and without shame or stigma.



Erin Quick


Erin Quick is a law student at the University of Pennsylvania and member of her school's If/When/How chapter, where students work on a pro bono project helping young people navigate the judicial bypass process. (And if you want to get your campus chapter involved in a similar project in your area, give us a holler (<https://www.ifwhenhow.org/support-resources/campus-organizing/>!))

We asked Erin how other law students can get involved helping people who need abortion care, and what keeps her motivated to do the work in a political climate that's deeply hostile to abortion access.

If/When/How: How did you get into working to help young folks access abortion care?

Erin Quick: I first got involved with helping young folks access abortion care when I started my first year of law school. During 1L I had the chance to get involved with the pro bono project my school's If/When/How chapter ran, and that included doing

interviews with minors who needed a judicial bypass in order to help fill out the petition they would need in their hearing before a judge. Since Pennsylvania requires parental consent, individuals under

18 who don't have a legal guardian present with them must petition the court to get the healthcare they choose. I believe that everyone should have the freedom to pursue the path they want in life. Providing judicial bypass counseling was a great way to protect the ability of other young folks to make choices about their reproductive futures. 

If/When/How: What do you see as the biggest challenges to abortion access for young people right now — where you live, or for the folks you work with, or more broadly/politically speaking?

EQ: The momentum in the abortion debate seems to be in favor of those who are anti-choice, and many people I talk to are not even aware of the hurdles people seeking abortions can face in states with restrictive abortion laws.

If/When/How: What advice do you have for law students who want to get into challenging and navigating parental involvement laws?

EQ: For folks in states that have parental involvement laws, I would suggest trying to find out if there is a need for law students to help minors who come to clinics but need a judicial bypass. If there are attorneys in the area who routinely represent minors in the hearings, reach out to them to see if there is any way that law students can get involved in the process, or if there is pro bono work that can be done. For those in states that do not have parental involvement laws, as well as those in states that do, get involved in the political process to be aware of what laws and bills state and local governments have or are considering. Call your representatives and make sure to vote in every election so that you can have a voice in that laws in your state.

If/When/How: What's the biggest misunderstanding or misconception that other folks — maybe even other folks in the repro movement — have about parental involvement laws and the judicial bypass process?

EQ: I think that many people think that parental consent could be a good thing when they first hear about it. If they have children, or think about how they would feel if they did, they would want their child to be open with them about something like getting an abortion. At the very least it could be a good thing for a minor to have to talk to someone about the choice of whether or not to have a child, since it can be an important decision. But the reality is that there are many cases where a teen needs a judicial bypass not because she wants to hide the abortion from her family, but because her parents are not in her life and the family member she is staying with is not her legal guardian.

Ultimately though, whatever the reason may be that a minor is not willing or able to notify their parents should not matter — it is their body and it should be their choice whether or not to have a child.

If/When/How: What inspires you to continue doing this work even (or especially) in a political climate or geography hostile to abortion access?

EQ: Although the impact of any given volunteer providing judicial bypass counseling to minors may be small in the face of the overall large amount of hostility toward abortion access in this country, for those individuals who are able to access a safe abortion with the support of volunteers the impact on their lives is real and potentially significant. Ireland's vote to repeal the ban on abortion there gives me hope that eventually there will be a shift in the opinion of the U.S. as a whole, and until then if people who care do what they can, then the harm of our hostile political climate will be mitigated.

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