

Okaloosa to host first Women's March event to rally for abortion rights Saturday

WUWF | By **Jennie McKeon**

Published October 1, 2021 at 3:40 PM CDT



Courtesy Photo

From left to right: Kate Kasten, Alison Smith, Carollyn Taylor and Heather Brescher. Brescher started the efforts to host a Women's March in Okaloosa.

WUWF
On the Media

Abortion Justice.

Three Florida Panhandle counties will be joining the cause with rallies in Escambia, Bay, and — for the first time — Okaloosa.

The [Rally for Abortion Justice](#) is in response to a Texas law that prohibits abortions as early as six weeks — before most pregnancies are detected — and opens the door for nearly any private citizen to sue abortion providers and others. Shortly after the bill took effect in Texas, Florida Rep. Webster Barnaby [proposed a similar bill](#).

“As soon as I saw the heartbeat bill in Texas, I knew it was coming here,” said Heather Brescher.

Brescher started the effort to form a Women’s March chapter in Okaloosa County and planned a rally for Niceville, where she lives.

“I thought, I don’t care if it’s just me walking down the street, I have to do something,” she said.

With the help from fellow organizers Carollyn Taylor and Alison Smith, the march became too big for Niceville and it was moved to Fort Walton Beach. The march is scheduled to start at 10 a.m. in front of the Fort Walton Beach Civic Center and will end at Liza Jackson Park about a mile and a half away. There will be a few speakers, including Dr. Jennifer Zimmerman who ran against U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz in 2018, and Okaloosa Democrats Chair Tracey Tapp.

As an OB/GYN nurse, Brescher said she wants women to know they have options even if they aren’t nearby.

“There are no abortion clinics in Okaloosa,” she pointed out. The closest one would be in Pensacola.

“But there’s not even a clinic for women to get birth control or a checkup,” she said. “This law is not going to stop abortions. This is taking away the safety aspect.”

The issue is also one of economics, said Brescher.



*Heather Brescher*

One of the signs made ahead of Saturday's rally for abortion rights.

"If you're a lower-income person, you might have to save up money (for the procedure) which puts you past the six-week mark," she said. "Some people might try to do it at home. That's what we're trying to stop."

Brescher has participated in previous marches, but never organized one. She said she immediately received negative comments from people online, even from her neighbors.

"I didn't expect the backlash," she said. "I've been called a baby killer — just really, really horrible stuff. I've gotten death threats. I don't know where all the hate and rage comes from. I love them anyway."

But Brescher has also received some positive responses.

"One woman said 'I can't publicly thank you but I wanted to send a message.'"

Carollyn Taylor, who helped organize the Okaloosa march, said the event is not about picking fights.

"We're adamant about this event being peaceful," she said. "There are broader conversations that need to happen, such as access to birth control and sex education in schools."

Taylor has been a political organizer in the Pensacola area for years, working on local and national campaigns. She says the three Panhandle marches are a "good sign of allyship."

"It shows the strengths and it shows growth," she said. "This is the reddest district in the state and women are saying 'no more' to the lack of abortion access."

On big push at Saturday's march will be getting people registered to vote, she added.

"We need to make sure people get to the polls," she said. "We're taking action."

As for Brescher, she said she doesn't regret coming out from the shadows to be a part of this cause. In fact, it's only motivated her to get more involved.

"I know my daughter's excited to be a part of the march and she's proud of me," she said. "That's very encouraging."

The [Okaloosa Women's March](#) is from 10 a.m. to noon, starting at Ft. Walton Beach City Hall 107 Miracle Strip Pkwy SW.

Women's March Pensacola and Worker's World Party will have a [car caravan and rally](#) starting at 10 a.m. at Open Books, 1040 N. Guillemard St. The rally will be at the 17th Avenue "Graffiti Bridge" starting at 11:30 a.m.

Local News



Jennie McKeon

Jennie joined WUWF in 2018 as digital content producer and reporter.

[See stories by Jennie McKeon](#)

© 2021 | WUWF Public Media
11000 University Parkway
Pensacola, FL 32514
850 474-2787

[WUWF Public Information File](#)

[Public Information File Assistance](#)

[WUWF EEO Report](#)

[About Us](#)

[Donate Now](#)

[Become An Underwriter](#)

[Become A Day Sponsor](#)

[Leave A Legacy](#)

[Search Our Site](#)

[Our Mission](#)

[Our Radio Schedule](#)

