# Bad Midwest Feminist Podcast - Episode 2

00:05
**HOST:** Hey, Bad Midwest Feminist listeners. Here at Bad Midwest Feminist, we're exploring what it means to be a feminist in the Central Midwest, the direction of feminism, and whether or not it's on the right track. Hey, and thanks for sticking around for part two.

For today's episode, I traveled all the way to the Windy City, otherwise known as the Shyest of Towns, Chicago. While I didn't have time to walk along Lake Michigan, I did speak with Alicia Hurtado, the director of communications and advocacy for Chicago Abortion Fund. This 40-year-old organization assists people attempting to access abortion care across state lines.

Originally from Texas, Alicia is a Midwest transplant, and we talked all about their thoughts on how abortion access fits into mainstream feminism, why Illinois is the top state for out-of-state residents seeking abortion care, and her many firsthand accounts of communicating with people trying to decipher their own state's abortion laws, and the confusion and miscommunication that stems from that.

So let's get into it.

01:06
**HOST:** Alicia. Do you identify as a feminist?

**HURTADO:** I do identify as a feminist.

**HOST:** Yeah. Can you speak as to why?

01:14
**HURTADO:** That's a great question. And honestly, I think that in my whole life, if you zoom out, one that I've been thinking about a lot, I feel like I grew up in the time when calling yourself a feminist was a bad thing, especially I grew up in Texas, it was the butt of a lot of jokes to be a feminist.

But I was that, you know, junior in high school leading our feminist club and being called a socialist for it. I do think there’s so many reasons why I'm a feminist. And really, the core is that I believe that all people deserve basic autonomy, deserve to be able to make decisions about their families and their lives and their futures, and deserve to do all of that free from systemic violence, free from really any sort of inhibition on their ability to be their authentic selves.

I think for me, feminism is not a strictly gendered philosophy. I think there's lots of room for men to also benefit from feminism in terms of really breaking down these rigid gender binaries that we have. Especially in the context of abortion care, I think a lot of it is just seeing that women are people, queer people are people. And, all people should have the same rights and abilities, regardless of what their gender is.

02:39
**HOST:** How does abortion care and access to abortion fit into your version and your vision of feminism?

**HURTADO:** My guiding star, North Star in this work, is the reproductive justice framework, which is the human right to have children, to not have children, and parent the children that we do have in safe and sustainable communities. To me, that vision is inherently a feminist vision.

It's really thinking about, how we can ensure that people who are marginalized, whether they're women, people of color, people who are facing a whole host of different systemic barriers to accessing equal or equitable resources, how can we ensure that we're breaking down those barriers as much as we can, and dreaming of a future where people have what they need. And to me, abortion access is integral for that.

03:33
**HURTADO:** Of course, I think it's kind of baked into the definition and the right to not have children. But also when I think about, you know, the long feminist struggle, reproductive justice being a huge component of that, coined by 12 Black feminists here in Chicago. In the 90s, you really think about how abortion access connects to people's ability, abilities to decide their own futures and the ability, their ability to care for their community, care for their existing family.

The majority of people who have abortions are parenting. And so their decision to have an abortion is just as much a personal decision as it is a decision to be able to take care of the people that they're taking care of. And to me, I think that's the beauty of feminism, is the beauty of reproductive justice, that it encourages us to extend beyond the individual. Like, of course, we're focused on individual rights and people being able to access those rights, but it's not always so rigid.

I think like an individual person being able to achieve or access x, y, z thing, it's also when they are able to do that, look at all of these impacts that it has on their full community and our ability to have healthy, safe, and thriving families and community.

04:53
**HOST:** Yeah. So you would say that access to abortion is really an integral component of feminism, and the ability to choose whatever path and or direction you'd like to go in your life.

05:04
**HURTADO:** Absolutely. And when you really boil down to it and think about abortion as health care, I think a lot of the politicization of abortion kind of falls away.  I feel like abortion as healthcare and all reproductive healthcare, whether it's fertility management, birth control, all of these things that I think have been siloed from general healthcare for so long, really, when you look at it as healthcare, as something that people should have equal access to, becomes a no-brainer.

Of course, people should get care if they need care.

05:40
**HOST**: Do you have any stories of anybody who has anybody when they find out that you work for Chicago Abortion Fund? Has anybody ever said something along the lines of like, ‘Oh, I'm I, I'm a, I'm a feminist, but I'm pro-life’ or something like disassociating the two? Have you experienced anything like that?

05:58
**HURTADO:** I think you get a range of reactions for sure. A lot of people who maybe just don't understand the work that we do at the Chicago Abortion Fund, or I've honestly had people who have talked to me about you know, 'Oh, I work in healthcare, but I don't see this as healthcare,' or, you know, 'This to me is an issue that's not important to me.'

And I think once you kind of peel back those layers and they start talking about core values of freedom and autonomy and, community wellbeing, those are the inroads that I try and make with folks who maybe initially are like, this isn't really my issue, or this isn't something that I see as connected to my kind of broader world view of feminism, you know?

And all of these things, of course, are connected to kind of a broader set of demands or the set of feminist demands for women and people of marginalized genders to have autonomy and to have safety, have security. I think when once we start walking down that path together, people come around.

07:09
[READ STORY HERE]

**AMANDA FAVAZZA:** Have you ever wanted to visit Wine Country for a weekend, but California and France seem too far away? Look no further than Augusta-Defiance, Missouri, for your next Midwest Wine Country weekend. I'm Amanda Favazza, and I'm the visual editor of Urban Plains. And I visited this untraditional wine area rooted in rich history, and you can too. Take a look at the story now out on Urban Plains.

**EMMETT MCMENAMY:** Visit urban-plains.com to read the story.

07:44
**HOST:** So, as I've been doing research and, like, you know, preparing for our conversation, I found a very interesting stat that I'd like to share with you, but it said that as of 2022, Illinois is the top state for out-of-state residents seeking abortion care. Why do you think that is?

08:00
**HURTADO**: Actually, as of last year, 1 in 4 people who were forced to cross state lines for abortion care came to Illinois for their abortion appointment. And so one, I can reflect on how much responsibility that is. I think Illinois is absolutely playing an outsized role in this national landscape. And to get to the bottom of the why, I feel like there's lots of converging factors into why people are looking to Illinois to access reproductive healthcare and particularly abortion care.

Some of that is proximity, location. We know that we're one of the few states where people can access care without restrictions or bans in the Midwest. Sometimes, where the closest option and option with the fewest barriers. For folks as far as Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, we routinely see those folks calling our help line. We know that there are streams of people from across the Midwest and across the South who are coming to Illinois because it might be the closest option, or at least logistically, the most convenient option.

Something we talk about a lot is just the inroads into Chicago and into Illinois. We have major highways to major airports, plane, train, bus, automobile.

09:20
**HOST:** A lot of options!

09:22
**HURTADO**: Yeah, there's just a lot of options to make it here. And sometimes it's more convenient for folks to, you know, hop on a flight and get to Chicago. There's a lot of direct flights here. We also have the largest abortion fund in the country. And so there are a lot of resources for folks if they need support paying for appointment costs, paying for or booking travel logistics, support with childcare, support with meals, we're able to kind of wrap folks around, or I guess provide that kind of wraparound support to get people where they need to go.

We also have a really robust hospital care system here in our state for people who need complex abortion care. And we built out a program in partnership between the Chicago Abortion Fund and area hospitals. In the Chicagoland area are one of the, we have a pretty unique hospital care set up for folks who need that type of advanced care. And the protections that we've built here have been huge. I think one thing that I hold really, top of mind when I'm doing my work is that Illinois didn't look that much different from Iowa, from Indiana, you know, 15 years ago.

When you think about the trajectory that we've had, in such a short amount of time to become what we are today, which is the biggest abortion access haven across the country, it didn't happen by accident. We did a lot of work. We repealed our trigger law that would have instituted an immediate abortion ban. Once the Dobbs decision came down in 2022, we allowed for state Medicaid coverage of abortion in Illinois, which has freed up so many resources for people who are coming from out of state for care.

11:13
**HURTADO**: We have patient and provider protections that have allowed for providers to be able to open up new clinics in our state with fewer logistical hurdles, as well as half our patients and people who are coming to our state seeking care feel really safe and secure about accessing care here.

And really, I think on the point of reproductive justice and not just looking at abortion, we also have kind of a host of resources available for residents of Illinois. That's all to say. I think the kind of bold, proactive messaging and action from our elected officials, pushed and informed by advocates and people doing work on the ground in our state, our location, in terms of being one of the few, really robust access points in the center of the country.

And then, of course, the resources that people are able to access through the Chicago Abortion Fund, just, our work just looks so, so different based on what it did before, but, we really have been able to step up and meet the moment and grow quite considerably to continue to meet the need, and we actually haven't had to turn anyone away who's been relying on Illinois since 2019.

12:30
**HOST:** So you would consider Illinois to be a safe haven for abortion care?

**HURTADO:** For me, there's like two wolves inside of me when I think about this question, because I think undeniably, when you look at what's happening in our country, Illinois absolutely is an incredible resource for people, not just in our state, which it absolutely is for people in our state, but also you know, tens of thousands of people that are coming to our state to access care every year. I think it would be incorrect to say that Illinois is not a safe haven for them for those tens of thousands of people.

And I know that at the Chicago Abortion Fund, we're here to continue filling gaps for the people who maybe aren't able to get to their appointment or to afford appointment costs without outside support. And for me, I think our role in filling those gaps only further proves that Illinois is a safe haven.

13:21
**HURTADO:** Of course. I think we we long have known that legality doesn't necessarily mean access, which is just to say, even though there's laws that allow people to access abortion care, doesn't mean that they're going to be able to afford that care or to get to the clinic or, you know, a whole host of other reasons why somebody might not actually be able to get an abortion.

And for us, we take it very seriously that we're filling in those gaps and are able to be that connection point between someone making a decision to access abortion care and being able to actually actualize that decision and get the care that they need. So, yeah, I would say it's a project. I don't think we're a safe haven, period, and it's a done deal.

But I think every day there's lots of great people, from elected officials to clinicians to providers to folks like our help line staff and the folks here at Chicago Abortion Fund that are working every day to continue to create this really safe space for people who need abortion care.

14:30
**HOST:** Can you tell me a specific story or stories about how the Dobbs decision, which was reached in 2022, and essentially the Supreme Court's overturning Roe v. Wade. Can you tell me a specific story about just how that affected Chicago, Chicago Abortion Fund's mission, and your goals and your efforts, and what you do?

14:52
**HURTADO:** I can zoom out quickly, and then I have a story in mind. But the change has been quite drastic. I think on its face, we do the same thing, right? We're breaking down barriers to abortion access. We're getting people from point A to point B.

But what it takes to get someone from point A to point B has shifted quite drastically. When I started with the abortion fund in 2020, we fielded 1600 calls on our helpline. That was a huge accomplishment for us, so we didn't have to turn a single person away. When you look at our numbers from last year, we fielded 16,000 calls. And so I think just the sheer scale of how we're operating is drastically different.

We also are supporting folks more regularly from much, much further. And so, kind of by extension, more people need that travel support, need more expensive travel support like flights, hotels, versus gas money. And for in terms of even our appointment costs, people are faced with that has also risen quite significantly. Both. I mean, there's so many reasons for this.

16:09
**HURTADO**: I think there's a lot less of a national infrastructure for abortion funds. There's fewer funding options, or at least the funding options that existed right after the Dobbs decision now are either cover less of an appointment cost, or have completely dissolved because they just couldn't continue to sustain them. So at least for CAF, for kind of stepping in and covering more of those needs for folks.

But I think also in general, people are being either pushed to later in their pregnancies, which means that they have a more expensive appointment cost or I mean, the the Dobbs decision, unfortunately, wasn't the only thing that happened in the last five years, and we're seeing a lot more folks that are struggling to make ends meet for a variety of different reasons.

I mean, the COVID-19 pandemic absolutely caused folks to have more economic need. Also, groceries are expensive. It's expensive in general just to exist and be a human right now, let alone cover an unexpected hundreds or thousands of dollars of medical cost that is time sensitive.

**HOST:** Yeah.

17:23
**HURTADO:** But one thing I think that is important to bring up, too, because it's something that anyone can help combat, is that there's so much more misinformation about abortion access, and people don't know their options. They don't know where to turn. They don't know who in their community they can talk to. And one example of that I remember, right when the Dobbs decision happened, I was working with someone who, had called us who lived in Iowa, and at the time, there was not an abortion ban in Iowa.

And even after the Dobbs decision, directly after, there was not an abortion ban in Iowa. But I remember I had been working with her prior to the decision coming down. And then, after the decision was released, Roe v. Wade was overturned. I didn't hear from her for a couple of weeks. And I was checking in, and I was like, you know, do you still need support?

Then just kind of see what she needed? And finally, a couple weeks later, she texted back and she said, ‘I don't know why you're reaching out to me. Abortion is illegal.’ And I was able to, you know, reassure her and let her know that she still had options, let her know that in Iowa at the time, abortion was still accessible. She could still go to the clinic that she was planning to go to. But I think I think about that a lot. And, of course, you see all these scary headlines. You're not really sure what's going on.

18:43
**HURTADO:** And you're already navigating a really stressful situation. And of course, somebody could get confused or could hear the wrong thing, or who knows who she was talking to in her personal life. But I, I think a lot about how just having that touch point and, and having she had someone that knew about the landscape that she could turn to and get that information from, and I think in a lot of ways, part of our work has changed quite drastically because we are able to be that for people. We're able to decode what is a really confusing landscape and give people their options.

19:31
**[STORY ADVERTISEMENT]**

**MELANIE KURE-O’REILEY:** Hi, I'm Melanie, and I'm the copy editor for Urban Plains magazine. Are you getting a little tired of living in your constant cycle of work to home, and home to work? What if I told you there's a place between those two just waiting to be explored? I'm working on a story about Midwestern bookstores and exploring how they can become your home away from home. Your local bookstore is out there waiting to become the third space in your community. You just have to go over there. This story is coming out in November, so keep an eye out for it.

**EMMETT MCMENAMY:** Visit urban-plains.com to read the story.

20:13
**HOST:** What are some key differences that you've noticed between how abortion and access to abortion is viewed in the Midwest versus elsewhere in the U.S.? Is there is there a difference?

20:26
**HURTADO:** There's absolutely a difference in terms of working with our elected officials and champions in our state. We just have much more possibilities and pushing forward proactive legislation, protective legislation versus, a lot of our sibling abortion funds and folks in surrounding states, or even, you know, surrounding regions. They just are more on the defense mode of trying to block anti-abortion legislation.

And I think that there's, there is a sense of and a pride in Illinois being a place where people are coming for abortion care, where, whether it's someone who's an elected official or people in our community, there's a lot of awareness and understanding that what we've built here is not just serving our communities and our neighbors or serving our neighbors on a much larger scale.

Thinking about people across the country who are coming to our state. And I think, like anywhere, there's always a broad range of opinion. Of course, I think even in places where you might not expect it, abortion is quite popular. 1 in 4 people who will get pregnant or get pregnant will have an

abortion or multiple abortions in their lifetime. So something that I, I like to say or try to say is, everyone loves someone who's had an abortion. Everyone has a personal connection to someone who's had an abortion, whether they know it or not.

22:08
**HURTADO:** And we know that, generally, nationwide abortion is quite popular. I do think that there's some places where you can be more or less public about your abortion advocacy. And I think now is the moment where we all need to be super public about our abortion advocacy, whether, you know, it's on a large scale, talking to elected officials, or on a small scale, bringing it up around the dinner table.

**HOST:** Yeah

22:34
**HURTADO:** And as someone who grew up in Texas and moved to Chicago, I think my mind was blown when I got here. It's very different in terms of the kind of movement landscape and where that kind of start line is, where those possibilities for pushing for abortion access are pushing for more equitable access to a whole range of things, including abortion care. That start line definitely looks different. And again, Illinois wasn't that different just a short time ago.

So, it definitely gives me hope. Being here, we're really lucky to have a strong and supportive community in Chicago and across the state, and particularly, really lucky to do this work alongside the people that we do it alongside. We have a really robust, incredible network of providers. We work really closely with a lot of independent abortion providers on our advocacy work here in Illinois. Yeah, they're just really, really great. And we all feel that responsibility very deeply for the work that we do.

23:45
**HOST:** Do you think it's possible for just women as a societal demographic to progress without access to abortion? Is that even possible, like, especially after threat after threat is made by politicians attempting to remove abortion access and also succeeding in doing it, too.

24:05
**HURTADO:** I mean, my short answer is no. I feel like abortion access is a huge and pivotal piece of healthcare access that we need to protect. And honestly, we're seeing now just the ramifications of abortion bans and restrictions, not only in terms of creating healthcare deserts, not only in terms of increasing rates of domestic violence and intimate partner violence in states with abortion bans, not only in increasing maternal mortality rates in states with abortion bans, particularly for Black women. I do think this is a huge feminist issue of our of our time, and I don't think it's the only issue of our time. Unfortunately, there's so much connected to just women and gender minorities being able to exist.

25:01
**HOST:** There's so many issues to choose from.

25:02
**HURTADO:** Yeah. And I think they are all connected, right? Like, how can you raise the children you need to have if you don't have access to abortion, but you also don't have access to public benefits, but you also don't have access to health care, but you also are, you know, fearing deportation. And there's all of these things that are quite connected.

And we see right now in this political moment we're living in, that billionaires are getting tax cuts while people are losing the very social safety net that they need to survive without abortion access. We're in certain states where we're definitely creating conditions where people are able to choose their futures, and maybe this is too woo-woo, but I'm just like, we're losing people whose energies should be poured into creating the futures they want to live and building the world that they want to see. Instead, their energy is being poured into navigating a whole host of barriers and restrictions, both through abortion access and then just to survival.

I think it's really devastating to think about how many freedom fighters who could be losing in terms of people who were just having to fight to survive, when we do have so much further to go. But I also think in terms of kind of connecting abortion access to this larger feminist vision. And when we think through, what does it mean to be truly liberated? I think abortion has to be on the table for that to be able to happen.

26:37
**HOST:** Do you think feminism is on the right track in the Midwest, or what you consider to be the right track?

26:45
**HURTADO:** I think that's such a hard question. That's a good question, but I don't know if I can answer it. But I do think there's a lot of, there's a network of really great people who are pushing for equal access, equal protection. I can speak most to the abortion access landscape, and I do think we are doing everything we can to ensure that people are able to access healthcare, period.

We don't at the Chicago Abortion Fund, we don't have any income requirements. We really try and make our intake as barebones as possible, in terms of removing any logistical or like bureaucratic barriers that might preclude someone from being able to access our support. And then within that we, we walk with people hand in hand the whole way for whatever they need until they're able to get, get care.

And I think in, in and of itself, our approach to me feels like a feminist approach. It feels like we're trying to center a full person and not just the person, but their support system and their families, and, you know, what timeline works the best for them. I think our work is necessarily kind of butting against a system that at every turn wants people to experience barriers and hardship and, you know, just systems that are not built to actually get people to where they need to go.

28:24
**HURTADO:** But we work, we work really well as a, as a network, both in Illinois and with other funds in our region and even beyond our region to get people to care. And that feels like hope. And it does feel like, when you look at, I'm gonna like history lesson and I'll try and keep it as broad strokes as

possible. But when you look at kind of the pre-Roe era, where in Chicago specifically we had the Jane Collective, which was a collective of underground women who are running an underground abortion services program.

We have actually, we still have Janes with us, and we've been able to kind of connect with them in this post-Roe era, and there are a lot of similarities in the work that we did. Of course, we're not providing abortions here, but we're getting people where they need to go, doing a lot of that financial and logistical support that they also did back, back in those days. But the key difference is we're above ground, and we don't have to be underground, and people can find out about us through a billboard campaign or, you know, through social media or all of these things.

And for me, I see that the work that so many people did before us really set up our work, and set us up to be able to meet this moment of incredible need, and incredible barriers for people who are seeking abortion care. And I can't help but say that that's the right track. That's our North Star. And it's something that's going to going to take a while. But I do think there's a lot of great people who are in this fight.

30:10
**HOST:** And that concludes the second episode of Bad Midwest Feminist. Thanks ever so much to Alicia Hurtado for taking the time out of their day to speak with me. My take from our conversation. Abortion is central to feminism, especially in the Central Midwest, with Illinois being an abortion safe haven not just for fellow Midwesterners, but for the rest of the country.

In abortion access, we can see that Midwest feminism serves a greater national interest and helps a wider audience than just Midwest residents. But before you press the pound key to end this call, let me leave you with these words of wisdom from Alicia, which can be found on the Chicago Abortion Fund's staff website.

"Everyone deserves to have affirming, supportive people in their corner while accessing abortion care. Funding abortion is an act of love, and standing beside someone until they get the care they deserve, through every barrier, is an act of resistance."

Do with that what you will. And until then, I'm Caroline Siebels-Lindquist with Urban Plains magazine, asking you to just keep talking.