

To the judges:

When the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion, Kavitha Surana knew that it would be crucial to document the human cost. For the next two years, she and other ProPublica journalists embarked on reporting detailing the consequences, both for women forced to have children they weren't prepared to care for and those who died in states with abortion bans after they couldn't access timely reproductive care.

Along the way, the team navigated ethical dilemmas and the tension of families who wanted to keep their painful history private or were fearful of repercussions of going public, striving to build relationships and trust with key sources.

Our immersive visual story – [The Year After a Denied Abortion](#) – demonstrates the careful way ProPublica balanced the agency of people in these stories with the urgent need to tell them.

Surana [first reported on Mayron Hollis'](#) life-threatening pregnancy and her abortion denial in 2023 in a piece that also offered readers a rare glimpse into the impact abortion bans have on medical providers. Given the tremendous response from readers who wanted to know what happened in the months following the harrowing delivery, we decided to keep Surana and freelance photographer Stacy Kranitz on the story.

As we followed Maryon's life over the course of a year, she invited us to witness some of her most intimate and difficult moments. We continually discussed with her our role as reporters and her boundaries, and gave her every chance to express reservations or concerns. We checked in regularly to ensure we shared the same understanding of how the story was being told, holding one last face-to-face visit to explain what she should expect of the details that would finally be published.

She remained steadfast in her desire for people to “see for themselves and feel it in their own lives” her family's struggles to raise two babies after a traumatic pregnancy while recovering from a history of addiction..

A testament to its resonance, audiences [spent more time with the piece than any other ProPublica published last year](#). We attribute that deep engagement to the intense intimacy of Kranitz's photographs and to the editing choices made. By keeping the text minimal, we let the images lead the storytelling.

The personal narrative was punctuated with short accountability asides that added important context about the state policy landscape, helping readers connect dots between decisions made by those in power and the consequences for this family. Above all else, what drove the story forward were moments captured by a skilled, compassionate documentary photographer who lived in the state and was trusted by the family to be present for so many important moments.

Surana's story on the death of Amber Thurman shows a similarly patient approach to balancing concern for people close to the story with our responsibility as journalists to inform the public.

It was Georgia death certificate data that Surana first spotted Amber's name. The record noted questionable causes of death: "sepsis" and "retained products of conception" after an at-home abortion. When she flew to Atlanta to meet Thurman's family in summer 2023, they weren't ready to talk. She kept trying for months, but went on maternity leave in the new year.

Surana should've still been on leave in summer 2024 when Thurman's family called, seeking her help to understand what happened to their daughter and sister. Surana returned to Atlanta with her husband and 4-month-old baby.

Through her reporting, Surana obtained a confidential report in which the Georgia maternal mortality review committee detailed Thurman's death and concluded it was preventable. Suffering from sepsis, Thurman waited 20 hours for doctors to clear her uterus of infected fetal tissue. They discussed, but delayed, a procedure restricted under the state's ban.

Later, Williams called Surana and thanked her for the story. The timing of publishing, in the heat of an election cycle, meant that people paid attention to what had happened to her daughter, and she was grateful that she was able to use her voice to advocate for other women [in an interview with Oprah](#). "When ProPublica came to my home, I pushed them away," she said during that interview, at a rally for Kamala Harris. "But Kavitha was persistent. She said it was something that you needed to know. 'You have to hear me: Women around the world, people around the world, need to know that this was preventable.'"

Thurman's story, and [the one that quickly followed about Candi Miller](#), radically shifted the national discussion. No longer a hypothetical talking point, preventable deaths were a new American reality. And as ProPublica reported, no one was systematically investigating them — [not the federal government](#) and [definitely not the states that passed these laws](#).

So ProPublica endeavored to do what they were not: Find out who was dying and learn why. With each of the [five preventable deaths](#), the conclusion sharpened: Abortion bans were warping maternal medicine and impeding lifesaving care, and not just for women who sought to end their pregnancies. Women were dying as doctors hesitated to treat miscarriages, even when fetal demise was inevitable or seemed to have already happened.

The stories needed to be unimpeachable as anti-abortion advocates waged a fierce campaign, attributing Thurman's death to malpractice and insisting bans had adequate exceptions. Reporters knew they'd need to find the women's relatives, convince them to request medical records and enlist at least a dozen doctors to review each case. We shelved potentially viable stories when relatives declined to talk to us and worked around the legitimate fears of one source about his privacy.

Reporters also went to great lengths to be fair to hospitals and medical providers involved in each case, who experts acknowledged were in a no-win situation as they navigated abortion bans in real time. We sought out doctors, nurses and others on the medical teams, knocking on

doors, calling and writing letters to ensure they were aware of what was coming in our stories. In Thurman's story, we decided not to name the doctors because we lacked medical records clearly showing who made key decisions. We named doctors in other cases when records showed they were responsible for certain decisions.

Finally, we thought it was important to arm readers with information about how to advocate for themselves during pregnancy loss. We consulted dozens of doctors and wrote a guide that presented the information in a format that would make it easy to access in an emergency.

We are pleased to submit our reporting – "The Life of the Mother" – for the Anthony Shadid Award for Journalism Ethics.