

ProPublica is a back-to-back Public Service Pulitzer winner

The Pulitzer board honored ProPublica for a second year running, this time for exposing the fatal consequences of vague abortion exceptions



Candace Fails poses for a portrait holding a picture of her late daughter, Nevaeh Crain, at her home in Vidor, Texas on October 24, 2024. Crain passed away on October 29, 2023 at 25 weeks of pregnancy due to preventable causes, including hemorrhaging, after seeking medical help at various hospitals. (Courtesy: Danielle Villasana/ProPublica)

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ProPublica has done it again.

When the Pulitzer Prizes were announced Monday afternoon, the Public Service award went to reporters Kavitha Surana, Lizzie Presser and Cassandra Jaramillo of ProPublica for their ongoing investigative series, [Life of the Mother](#). Marjorie Miller, administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes, called it “urgent reporting about pregnant women

who died after doctors delayed urgently needed care for fear of violating vague ‘life of the mother’ exceptions in states with strict abortion laws.”

In an interesting twist, it is a consecutive Pulitzer win in the same category for the nonprofit newsroom. Last year, it won the 2024 Pulitzer Prize in Public Service for the work of [Joshua Kaplan, Justin Elliott, Brett Murphy, Alex Mierjeski and Kirsten Berg](#), who brought forth ambitious reporting about the lavish gifts and trips a small group of politically influential billionaires gave to Supreme Court justices.

After the announcements Monday, a still-overwhelmed Surana said she and her colleagues were honored.

“We undertook this reporting because no one else was looking into the consequences of these laws, in this detail. And we’re going to continue to do it,” she said. “This recognition is just so meaningful because it means more people can become aware of the consequences of these laws, and we’ll be able to keep looking into these cases and what has happened in so many states that have banned abortion across the country.”

Alexandra Zayas, a deputy managing editor at ProPublica who edited the series, said she was in awe of the reporters.

“I have been proud of them all along, but now I’m thrilled that everybody else recognizes and is celebrating the hard work and the relentlessness of what they have done,” said Zayas, who worked closely with other editors on the series. “So I’m just over the moon for my reporters.”

Zayas credited Surana, who joined ProPublica in 2022 as a national reporter, for laying the groundwork for this series three years ago when she was placed on the abortion beat.

“She had listened to what all the doctors were saying, which was that women were going to die if states passed abortion bans,” Zayas said. “And so she did two very smart things: She started building sources on the front lines, including people who study maternal deaths in different states. And she started looking at death records in states with abortion bans, to see if she could spot any deaths that happened because of the abortion bans.”

Zayas said it was in the summer of 2023 that Surana spotted Amber Thurman’s name in a medical examiner’s death data. Thurman, a 28-year-old mother, died after she couldn’t access legal abortion care in Georgia.

Over the course of a year, Zayas recounted how Surana attempted to talk to Thurman’s family. She tried emailing, calling, visiting.

“They wouldn’t talk to her until she was out on maternity leave, when Amber Thurman’s sister called Kavitha, and Kavitha dropped everything she was doing,” she said, “and with her baby and her husband, traveled to Atlanta to uncover that first story, and was sprinting ever since.”

Zayas, who joined ProPublica in 2017, said she could share many examples of the sacrifices that these reporters made and the obstacles that they overcame to tell the stories of the five women who died preventable deaths.

“I always say the prerequisite to being a reporter is courage. It’s just the basic requirement of the job,” she

said. “And these four — which is Lizzie, Kavitha, Cass and (photographer) Stacy (Kranitz) — exhibited tremendous, pure-hearted courage throughout all of this.”

Stephen Engelberg, ProPublica’s editor-in-chief, described Monday’s announcement as an amazing moment.

“This is a story where nothing is on the surface, everything has to be dug out,” he said. “And their ability to tell these stories and to find this information and to bring it to life is just terrific.”

Engelberg said there’s a lot of talk in the news industry about how increasingly difficult it is to do journalism with impact. That, he said, is what ProPublica is all about.

“Here’s a state that felt very confident that it had done the right thing in writing its abortion law. We wrote these stories, and the author of the law initially said, ‘There’s nothing to change here. We’re fine.’ And ultimately, he was persuaded just in the last few days that it had to be addressed,” Engelberg said. “And so I think there’s such an enormous amount of hope that you can glean from what has just happened. This is a story about journalism making a difference, and you can make a difference anywhere, anytime.”

Following ProPublica’s reporting, the Texas Senate last week unanimously passed Senate Bill 31, called The Life of the Mother Act, with the goal of preventing maternal deaths under the state’s strict abortion ban.

Asked about what he makes of ProPublica’s consecutive Pulitzer Prizes for Public Service, Engelberg described it as a terrific honor. Curiosity led him to look up the past

instances this has happened, and he found it had occurred at least once before. The Washington Post won in 1999 and 2000.

“Very unusual. I think, in all honesty, not a total surprise. I mean, we’ll probably never do it again,” he said, laughing. “But the fact is, we do set out to try to find original stories that have an opportunity for journalism that makes a difference.”

Nearly a week ago, Surana, Jaramillo and Presser were also awarded the [Poynter Journalism Prizes Batten Medal](#), which recognizes exceptional journalism that makes a difference to the lives of people and their communities.

Surana said she and her colleagues would toast this evening to their Pulitzer win. But they’re also in the middle of more reporting. They have another story to complete this week.

This year’s finalists for the 2025 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service were:

- The Boston Globe, with contributions from the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, for its [sweeping coverage](#) of the financial mismanagement of a major hospital chain, exposing how corporate malfeasance, personal greed and government neglect led to compromised care and deaths.
- The New York Times for [relentless reporting by Dave Philipps](#) that forced Congress and the Pentagon to acknowledge the devastating brain injuries U.S. troops were suffering from the effects of repeated low level blasts during weapons training.