



WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM
stronger together

WRJ REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS GUIDE 2022



This resource guide is intended to help Reform Jewish sisterhoods, congregations, and individuals mobilize and advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice in their communities. This comprehensive guide of resources and actions will help you kickstart or expand advocacy efforts for this issue.

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A WORD ABOUT LANGUAGE

Women are not the only people who get pregnant. Please use inclusive and affirming language, including "pregnant people" or "people at risk of pregnancy." We note that this does not mean we are moving away from identifying this as a women's issue - it can be both women and people who can get pregnant.

Say the word "abortion": When we say "abortion" instead of using euphemisms, it sends the message that abortion should be free from barriers and is not regarded as a shameful, secretive, or last resort decision. Abortion is a nuanced medical decision that many people come to over the course of their lives. We are asking for legally protected, funded, equitable, supported, and destigmatized access to abortion as soon as someone makes their decision.

We also encourage you to include language around "**abortion access**," not just reproductive rights. Rights do not guarantee access. This has been a significant barrier for decades - especially in minority communities - even when rights are protected. In many contexts, we know that rights can be limited to or essentially revoked by denying the access needed to exercise them. Together, we can move beyond just protecting Roe and towards justice, compassion, accessibility, and respect. Roe, which made some abortions legal, doesn't mean that it's accessible, affordable, or free from shame and stigma. Roe is the floor, not the ceiling.

REFORM JEWISH VALUES AND TEXTS

Life is sacred in Judaism. Banning potentially lifesaving medical procedures and interfering with a doctor's best medical decision-making runs contrary to the Jewish commandment to protect life. In addition, restricting abortion, contraceptives, and other family planning methods to only those who can afford or access them also contradicts the Jewish commandment to protect life.

This understanding, combined with a biblical and rabbinic emphasis on human dignity (kavod ha'briyot), has led the Reform Movement to view the life of the pregnant individual as paramount, placing a stronger emphasis on protecting existing life than on potential life (Exodus 21:22-23). The great physician and Rabbi Maimonides said, "if a woman is in hard labor, her life takes precedence over [the fetus'] life."

In the Mishnah Ohalot 7:6, a woman is forbidden from sacrificing her own life for the fetus, and if her life is threatened, she is allowed no other option but abortion. In addition, if the individual's mental health is at risk, then their life should take priority, giving them no other option than to terminate the pregnancy. It is due to the intrinsic Jewish belief in the sanctity of life that abortion is viewed under some circumstances as both a moral and necessary decision.

The Reform Movement interprets the use of the phrase "her life comes before its life" to not only mean abortion is permitted and necessary when someone's physical life is in jeopardy, but that the life of the person who is already living, their future aspirations, plans, and dreams, must also be taken into consideration.

Rabbi Marci Bellows, in her article, ["Choice. Period."](#) in the New York Jewish Week reminds us that for the "first forty days following conception, the fetus is considered "mere fluid" (Mishnah Yevamot 69b). Rabbi Bellows reminds us that even Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, formerly of the Israel Supreme Rabbinical Court, supports some abortions even when the harm being avoided by abortion is non-lethal. And that is why the Reform Movement has expressed its support since 1929, and the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice states, "I am pro-faith. I am pro-family. I am pro-choice."

WRJ & REPRO RIGHTS

For nearly 85 years, WRJ has been a leading advocate for reproductive health rights. We've adopted more than a dozen resolutions affirming a strong and vocal stance and mobilized members to speak out for women's rights. We were among the first in the Reform Movement to call for access to information about contraception and abortion reform.

On abortion, WRJ makes clear that, "the right to choose ... is a personal decision based on religious, moral, or cultural values and beliefs. It should not be determined for others by special interest groups whether religious or otherwise nor should the government be the enforcing agency for their points of view."

Similarly, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), and other Reform Movement affiliates have long supported the rights of pregnant individuals to make decisions about their reproductive health according to their own beliefs. Before Roe v. Wade, the Reform Movement cited a "moral imperative to modernize abortion legislation," lamenting that "illegal abortions yearly take a tragic and needless toll." When Roe v. Wade legalized abortion, the URJ applauded the decision and issued a resolution opposing government restrictions that would limit access to abortion services.

In the decades following this landmark court decision, there have been countless attempts to erode the constitutional right to an abortion on federal and state levels. While Roe continues to be the law of the land, subsequent court decisions, federal laws, and state restrictions have made abortion inaccessible and unaffordable for millions of Americans, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants, young people, people with disabilities, and lower-income individuals. For this reason, we are committed to working in solidarity with leaders in marginalized communities and grounding our advocacy in the reproductive justice framework.

WRJ & REPRO RIGHTS CONT.

Reproductive Justice is a human rights framework coined by Black leaders nearly 30 years ago. SisterSong defines it as "The human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. When using the term reproductive justice, we must address how race class, gender identity, immigration status, disability, location, and other levels of oppression impact our experiences.

Through this framework, we know that the legal right to an abortion is meaningless if it is not accessible, due to cost, geographic location, or other barriers. We are also compelled to advocate for accessible and affordable family planning services which can disrupt generational cycles of poverty and avoid preventable maternal and infant deaths. We see the critical need for comprehensive sex education which empowers people to make informed decisions about their bodies, sexual activities, and futures.

To learn more about the origins of the reproductive justice framework, visit [SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective](#) and [In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda](#).

For a list of resolutions passed by the Reform Movement relating to these issues, scroll down to Appendix A in this guide.

STATE AND LOCAL ADVOCACY

Recently, we have witnessed unprecedented efforts by states throughout the U.S. to restrict or ban abortion. Since Roe v. Wade in 1973, a total of 1,336 abortion restrictions have been enacted, 44 percent in the last decade alone, including mandatory waiting periods, parental consent laws, biased counseling, gestational bans, and targeted regulation of abortion providers (TRAP) laws. In 2021 alone, a record number of 108 state laws were enacted to restrict abortion access. The Guttmacher Institute regularly updates a [state law tracker](#).

As a result of these state restrictions, hundreds of clinics have been forced to close, providers denied the ability to provide necessary medical procedures, and patients left unable to obtain the health care services they need.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS IN CANADA

In Canada, we can see the interplay of abortion rights and abortion access as interconnected. While the right to an abortion is not restricted in Canada, access is. And, where the government blocks your access to exercise your rights, how real are your rights?

In 1988, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in R. v. Morgentaler that a federal law criminalizing abortion was unconstitutional. Canada currently has no applicable law, and therefore enjoys no restriction on the right to an abortion at any stage. However, the provinces can exercise control over abortion access through the purse strings, as the provinces determine the flow of funds to limit abortion access. For example, there is legislation currently pending in New Brunswick over just that issue, after New Brunswick denied funding for abortions at clinics, and only funded them at two urban hospitals.

The issue of abortion access in general and safe access in particular, including in rural areas, were issues in the most recent Canadian election and continue to be a vehicle effectively to restrict the right to an abortion. Those on the front lines in Canada keep a close eye on the chipping away of rights in the United States since 1973, and the importing of tactics trying to restrict abortion access and ultimately abortion rights.

ABORTION RIGHTS & ACCESS IN THE COURTS

Roe v. Wade was not the end of the fight for reproductive rights. After Roe, some states continued placing restrictions on abortion and made the procedure increasingly difficult to access. Reproductive rights activists took these laws to court with mixed results. In 1992, the Supreme Court weighed in on the issue in Planned Parenthood v. Casey. The case affirmed the core ruling of Roe v. Wade but also upheld that state-mandated barriers to abortion were legal as long as they did not impose an “undue burden” on the person seeking abortion services. However, the definition of “undue burden” is broad and up for interpretation. As a result, the door has been left wide open for states to impose strict barriers to abortion access just shy of an “undue burden.”

One example: In 2016, the Supreme Court ruled on Whole Women’s Health v. Hellerstedt, a case that challenged a Texas targeted regulation of abortion providers (TRAP) law that would have forced a significant percentage of abortion clinics in the state to shut down. TRAP laws create barriers to accessing abortion services by putting burdensome restrictions on abortion providers. The Court ruled that the Texas law was overly burdensome to those seeking abortion care, and as a result, was unconstitutional. This case was a huge win for those in the reproductive rights community. In October 2019, the Supreme Court decided to take up a nearly identical case challenging a similar law in Louisiana. For the June Medical Services, LLC v. Russo case, the Court ruled that the Louisiana state law placing hospital-admission requirements on abortion clinic doctors was unconstitutional, upholding its own precedent and reaffirming the constitutional right to abortion care.

In November 2021, the Court heard arguments for two Texas cases brought forward by abortion providers and the U.S. Department of Justice against Texas’s Senate Bill 8, which is the most restrictive ban yet, with extensive limits on abortions and enforcement by private citizens who sue those who help someone receive an abortion. On December 10, 2021, the Supreme Court released a decision allowing narrow legal challenges to continue by declining to put the law on hold. Lower courts continue their review of the case and are denying access to abortion for thousands of Texans before the issue is decided.

On December 1, 2021, the Court heard arguments in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, a case that directly challenges the Roe decision and deals with the constitutionality of a 2018 Mississippi state law that bans abortions after the first 15 weeks of pregnancy. If these laws are deemed constitutional, they will have devastating effects. In fact, if the Supreme Court overturns or guts Roe, 26 states are certain or likely to ban abortion, and some even have laws that will spring into effect immediately as summarized [here](#).

STATES WITH PENDING SUPREME COURT CASES

In January 2022, the pending Supreme Court Cases concern Mississippi and Texas.
Here are additional references for those states:

Massachusetts

Learn how WRJ women and other leaders in the Reform Movement worked together to pass a version of the ROE Act into state law [here](#).

Mississippi

Oral arguments on the case of Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization were heard at the U.S. Supreme Court on December 1, 2021. [Here are details on the case.](#)

Places to donate in Mississippi

- [Abortion Care Network - Southeast](#)
- [Mississippi Reproductive Freedom Fund](#)
- [Planned Parenthood - Southeast](#)
- [Yellowhammer Fund](#)

Texas

- [Read about the Texas anti-abortion law here](#)
- [Reform Movement's response here](#)

Places to donate in Texas

- [Buckle Bunnies Fund](#)
- [Jane's Due Process](#)
- [Texas Equal Access Fund](#)
- [Supporting Your Sistahs \(SYS\) through the Alfiya Center Abortion Fund](#)
- [West Fund](#)

HOW TO SPEAK OUT FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The list below is not intended to be an exhaustive list of actions that can be taken. After determining your priorities lie with your sisterhood or congregation, we encourage you to think creatively about the types of actions you would like to take and share them with us on the Yammer Advocacy page with the hashtag - #WRJAbortionRights or #WRJRepro.

- Review the state legislative tracker [here](#).
- Build relationships with abortion justice organizations leading advocacy efforts. Reach out to your Planned Parenthood affiliate, ACLU affiliate, NARAL, state reproductive health, and reproductive justice organizations such as Reproductive Equity Now, Pro-Choice Ohio, or Pro-Choice North Carolina that succeeded the NARAL state affiliates, or other organizations.
- Plan a WRJ District meeting with state legislators and their staff. This is a great way to build a relationship and ensure your priorities are heard.
- Engage with local voting rights, voter registration, redistricting, local elections, judges, and other "Freedom to Vote" actions. Making change on the issue of reproductive health and rights begins at the ballot box.
- Advocate for comprehensive sex education or sex education funding in your local school district. Comprehensive sex education includes information about sex, sexuality, relationships, and contraception. Sex education is directly linked to reproductive health and rights. Without it, individuals cannot make informed decisions about their bodies, sexual activities, or futures.
- Fill out the RAC/WRJ's Action Alert on the [Women's Health Protection Act](#) (WHPA) and Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance Act (EACH Act) to urge your members of Congress to support abortion access and affordability. If you want to, you can customize the RAC's template letters (linked above) using your values and personal experiences.
- Sign up for WRJ's e-newsletter, [Advocacy Matters](#), to stay informed about upcoming rallies, events, and phone banking opportunities.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM IDEAS

Here are some ideas to think about engaging your community in educational programming.

Religious Group Collaboration: Collaborate with other Religious organizations, whether Jewish or interfaith. There is a false narrative that "religious people oppose abortion." We know differently - Judaism helps inform our support of abortion and reproductive rights. For example, host an interfaith panel on reproductive health and rights. There are many faith groups to partner with that support reproductive rights and believe in women's moral authority to make such decisions autonomously. The [Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice](#) has great resources for interfaith dialogue on reproductive health, rights, and justice.

Local Providers and Advocates: Providers and advocates for abortion and reproductive health want to hear from you. They are under pressure everywhere. Reach out to your local abortion provider or advocacy network to do a joint education program. Consider working with others in your congregation or across multiple congregations to bring people together around reproductive health and rights. Explore other ways to work or educate together.

Related Advocacy Topics: Provide educational programs about the connection between reproductive health and other rights and areas of advocacy to bring more people to the table. For example, voting rights and political engagement beginning at the local level can serve as a related topic because of its direct connection to abortion laws.

Lifelong Learning: Offer a lifelong learning class about what the Torah and Talmud say about reproductive rights. Ask your clergy to speak about reproductive health, rights, and justice from the bimah. This will reduce the stigma and shame surrounding these conversations for so long. Dedicate one Shabbat service as "[Repro Shabbat](#)" around the anniversary of [Roe v. Wade](#) (January 28-29, 2022).

Create safe spaces: Conversation about abortion and many other topics related to reproductive health, including infertility, miscarriage, sex and sexuality education, and more, is not always easy and sometimes still carries an unwarranted stigma. Create spaces, times, and opportunities in your congregation to share stories and open conversation. With regard to abortion, in particular, some people may believe they don't know anyone [else] who has had an abortion, but statistics show that 1 in 4 women have had one. Healing services, the sharing of a personal narrative as part of a program, and the use of the arts are among many ways to create opportunities to share and find we are not alone.

VOLUNTEER & DONATE

- **Volunteer to be an escort at your local abortion clinic.** - Contact your local Planned Parenthood Affiliate or local abortion provider to find more information about what is needed.
- **Raise money for your local abortion fund.**
 - Many people seeking abortion care face financial, geographic, and other logistical barriers. Abortion funds help ease this burden.
 - This may also be an excellent opportunity to discuss the intersection between reproductive rights and economic injustice.
- **Host a menstrual hygiene product packing day to deliver to homeless shelters and domestic violence shelters.**
 - The Sisterhood at Congregation Rodeph Sholom in New York, NY, received a [2018 WRJ Or Ami Award](#) for their monthly Days for Girls program, creating reusable menstrual hygiene kits. Many other local sisterhoods have been inspired to replicate or otherwise engage with the program.
 - Be inspired and informed by what happened in Canada - it took less than six months for the No Tax on Tampons campaign to be successful. "If that isn't inspiring for the activists working to make menstrual products more accessible for Americans, what is? [How Canada Finally Axed Its Federal Tampon Tax](#) - Ms. Magazine (msmagazine.com). To learn more about the Tampon tax in the United States, read about it [here](#).

Learn more about and consider making a donation to one or more of the following organizations:

- [All Above All](#)
- [NARAL Pro-Choice](#)
- [Planned Parenthood](#)
- [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism](#)
- [Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice](#)
- [Ultraviolet](#)
- [URGE](#) - Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
- [Women Help Women](#)
- [Women of Reform Judaism Social Justice Fund](#)

FEDERAL, STATE & PROVINCIAL PARTNERS

- **[73 Forward \(Powered by National Council of Jewish Women\)](#)**: This organization is a Jewish movement for abortion justice. [Watch their video](#)
- **[Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights](#)**: A reproductive and sexual health service provider and advocate, including working for global health and rights. Action Canada brings together and is the successor organization to Planned Parenthood Federation Canada, Canadians for Choice (formerly CARAL), Canadian Federation for Sexual Health (formerly Planned Parenthood of Canada), and Action Canada for Population and Development.
- **[American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\)](#)**: A leading civil liberties organization that works actively on reproductive rights. This website contains updates on major reproductive rights cases and pieces of legislation around the country. The ACLU also has state-wide chapters.
- **[Center for Reproductive Rights](#)**: The only global legal advocacy organization dedicated to reproductive rights with expertise in U.S. constitutional and international human rights law.
- **[Guttmacher Institute](#)**: A leading research and policy organization committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights in the U.S. and globally. This website is an excellent resource for graphics, maps, and other visual devices to track reproductive rights in your community and worldwide.
- **[In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda](#)**: This national organizational initiative is designed to amplify and lift the voices of Black women at the national and regional levels. The partnership comprises eight local Black women's Reproductive Justice organizations throughout the U.S.
- **[Liberate Abortion Campaign](#)**: A multi-tactical coalition of 100+ organizations who have come together to expand power, grow compassion, provide education, and build a groundswell of support for abortion access across the U.S.

FEDERAL, STATE & PROVINCIAL PARTNERS CONT.

- [National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health \(NLIRH\)](#): The only national reproductive justice organization dedicated to advancing health, dignity, and justice for the 29 million Latinas families and communities in the U.S.
- [NARAL Pro-Choice America](#): One of the leading organizations fighting for reproductive rights, NARAL's national office and its 22 state affiliates actively monitor state legislation and are great resources for education and advocacy.
- [National Council of Jewish Women \(NCJW\)](#): A grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families, and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms.
- [National Women's Law Center \(NWLC\)](#): A leader in advancing gender equity through litigation and policy initiatives. NWLC is also a helpful tool for learning more about pay equity, gender-based violence, and other women's rights issues.
- [Planned Parenthood Action Fund \(PPFA\)](#): A website with great educational information and resources for action on a federal- and state-wide level. The "State News" section of their website provides tracks legislation in your state, and how to connect with local Planned Parenthood chapters.
- [SisterSong](#): A Southern-based, national membership organization whose aim is to build an effective network of individuals and organizations to improve institutional policies and systems that impact the reproductive lives of marginalized communities.
- [The Period Purse](#) (menstrual equity, Canada): This organization strives to achieve menstrual equity and reduce the stigma surrounding periods," partners with school boards and has a book club, project ideas. and opportunities to engage all age groups in the fight for period positivity and menstrual equality.

GLOSSARY

- Crisis Pregnancy Center: Commonly referred to as CPCs, crisis pregnancy centers are fake health clinics that exist to persuade individuals from having an abortion. CPCs are staffed mainly by volunteers (not medical professionals) and have a reputation for providing inaccurate healthcare information. There are over 4,000 CPCs in the United States, many of which are run by religious groups.
- Hyde Amendment: Three years after Roe v. Wade, Congress passed the Hyde Amendment which bars the use of federal health insurance for abortions unless in the instance of rape, incest, or if the pregnant individual's life is in danger. This provision disproportionately impacts low-income women, students, and women of color who depend on federal health insurance plans such as Medicaid, Indian Health Services, and TRICARE.
- Intersectionality: People of all races, religions, sexual orientations, and gender identities and expressions have abortions. Bans and restrictions disproportionately impact communities that have survived systemic oppression and people who hold multiple marginalized identities.
- Reproductive Health: This primarily focuses on reproductive healthcare services (i.e., abortion and birth control) for patients and clients with a focus on improving and expanding research and medical services.
- Reproductive Justice: This refers to a human rights framework coined by Black leaders nearly 30 years ago. SisterSong defines it as “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.” When using the term reproductive justice, we must address how race, class, gender identity, immigration status, disability, location, and other levels of oppression impact our experiences.

GLOSSARY

- Reproductive Rights: This analyzes the core issue as the lack of legal protection, laws, or enforcement of laws that protect the legal right to reproductive healthcare services (i.e., abortion and birth control)
- Targeted regulation of abortion providers (a.k.a. TRAP laws): These laws are medically onerous regulations on abortion providers and clinics. Examples of TRAP laws include mandating that abortion providers have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital or that abortion facilities meet the same medical standards for ambulatory surgical centers.
- The EACH Act: This promotes the affordability of abortion care by eliminating federal coverage restrictions on abortion services. The EACH Woman Act (this) would ensure that an individual's access to abortion services is not dependent on their health insurance or income.
- The Women's Health Protection Act (WHPA): This legislation assures the right to access abortion care, free from bans, obstacles, and medically unnecessary restrictions that are not required for similar health care services (i.e., TRAP laws).
- Undue burden: This is the standard of judicial scrutiny applied to restrictions on abortion. To establish that regulation of abortion constitutes an "undue burden" and is therefore unconstitutional, plaintiffs must establish that the regulation places a substantial obstacle in the path of an individual seeking an abortion.

APPENDIX A: REFORM MOVEMENT RESOLUTIONS

- **Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ)**

- [Birth Control Literature \(1935\)](#)
- [Resolution on Reproductive Rights \(1989\)](#)
- [Resolutions, Statements, and Advocacy Alerts on reproductive rights \(40+ statements\)](#)

- **Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR)**

- [Resolution on Abortion \(1929\)](#)
- [Resolution on Abortion \(1974\)](#)
- [Resolution on Violence Against Women \(1990\)](#)
- [Resolution on International Women's Rights \(1994\)](#)
- [Resolution on Violence Against Reproductive Health Clinics \(1995\)](#)
- [Resolution on State Restrictions on Access to Reproductive Health Services \(2008\)](#)

- **Union for Reform Judaism (URJ)**

- [Abortion Reform \(1967\)](#)
- [Abortion \(1975\)](#)
- [Resolution on Free Choice in Abortion \(1981\)](#)
- [Reproductive Rights \(1990\)](#)
- [Resolution on Women's Health \(1993\)](#)

MATERIALS TO SHARE

- [The Guttmacher Institute](#) is a superb resource on abortion and reproductive health rights with up-to-date info on state policies, legislation, trends, statistics, data polls, talking points, etc.

[Article in Lilith Magazine](#) written by former WRJ/RAC Reproductive Rights Associate Ally Karpel emphasizes the urgency of taking action against bans with a list of agencies that assist with access, similar to the list above.

[NBC News story](#) makes an interesting point regarding how we think about the safety of "illegal" abortions.

[Politico article](#) explains the rise of the political power of the Religious Right.

- [Article](#) from the Guttmacher Institute describing one impact from the Texas abortion ban.
- [Article](#) from 2018 by WRJ past Advocacy VP Julia Weinstein contains many resources and information.

[Article](#) FDA permanently allowing abortion pills by mail.

[WRJ Blog](#). Several articles regarding reproductive health and rights can be found on the WRJ website.

- [Roe v. Wade is at Risk, We Must Raise Our Voices for Abortion Rights](#)
- [Our Votes Matter This November - Especially on the Local Level!](#)
- [People of Faith Say: Abortion is Essential!](#)
- [Organizing to Expand Reproductive Rights - The Massachusetts ROE Act](#)



WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM
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Women of Reform Judaism is a network of Jewish women working together to empower women and communities through sisterhood, spirituality, and social justice.

For more information about our work, visit our website at [WRJ.org](https://www.wrj.org).

Please follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

This reproductive rights and health guide was updated in January of 2022.