



Advocacy Update

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Access to Reproductive Health and Rights: Roe v. Wade at Thirty-Nine

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Reproductive rights advocates, and indeed all women, have had good news this past week! HHS Secretary Sebelius announced that the regulations regarding the new health care legislation would guarantee almost all women contraceptive services without co-pays or other costs. However, they do include a minor expansion of the religious exemption clause by permitting an exemption for religious employers devoted to worship whose employees are of the same faith.

Nonetheless, as we look back on the year leading to the January 22nd thirty-ninth anniversary of Roe v. Wade, assaults on women's access to reproductive rights and health care have been seen in Congress and state legislatures, including efforts to defund clinics, such as those of Planned Parenthood, that provide low-income women with needed reproductive health services.

In May 2011, our Board of Directors, cognizant of these assaults, adopted the statement "Issues in Reproductive Rights and Health," reaffirming WRJ's commitment to protecting "women's reproductive rights, access to health services, and access to safe legal abortion."

The WRJ 48th assembly opening plenary featured Cecile Richards, President of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, who spoke with wisdom, humor, and élat, about the threats to women's reproductive health and rights, inspiring us to increase our efforts to protect them. [Click here](#) for the video of Cecile Richards' speech.

Rabbi Marla Feldman, WRJ's new Executive Director, in discussing the thirty-ninth anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the right to privacy, and freedom of conscience at this time of legislative assault, made the following important statement.

The continuing viability of Roe v. Wade is on many of our minds during the anniversary of this landmark Supreme Court decision, particularly as American values are the subject of debate during presidential primaries. At stake is not only a woman's right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, but also the fundamental rights of privacy and religious freedom.

Some have argued that reproductive rights is not a 'Jewish' issue. This is just plain wrong. On the simplest level, all women – including every Jewish woman – in America will be affected by changes in policy that limit the right of women to make such deeply private decisions based on their own faith and values. Embodied both in Jewish law and Jewish values is the notion that women are created in the image of God, entitled and empowered to make moral decisions.

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit www.wrj.org/social-justice-home

Use this opportunity to listen to Cecile Richard's keynote address, read the WRJ board statement, and take action:

- Speak out against efforts to defund Planned Parenthood or other reproductive health services and/or place additional obstacles in the way of women seeking safe legal abortions,
- Inform your members about the proposed threats to women's health, and
- Work with local Planned Parenthood clinics and those offering similar services to provide them with assistance and advocacy as needed.