

Issues in Reproductive Rights and Health – 05/23/2011

WRJ Board of Directors Statement

Concern about reproductive health can be found in the earliest texts of our tradition. The Torah tells us that when “. . .Rebekah became pregnant. The children pressed against each other inside her. She thought:— If this is so, why do I exist? So she went to inquire of Adonai. Adonai said to her: Two peoples are in your belly; . . . (Genesis 25:22-24). And the book of Samuel poignantly describes Hannah’s childlessness (I Samuel:1-20).

Women of Reform Judaism, formerly the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS), has long been a supporter of full legal access to women’s reproductive health care and abortion rights. As early as 1935, NFTS passed a resolution urging that U.S. federal law be amended to allow medical personnel to send birth control literature through the mail. The biennial assembly in 1989 endorsed the Roe v. Wade decision, stated our unwavering commitment to preserve the reproductive rights of women, and supported funding for clinics that provide reproductive services to women. In a 1990 board statement, we called for more research on contraception and abortion services including RU 486.

This year, there have been a wide range of attacks on women’s reproductive rights and health care services. At the federal and state levels, law makers are proposing additional stringent restrictions on abortion. The No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, which was passed by the House of Representatives on May 4, 2011, was described by a blog on the Huffington Post (5/4/11) as “an aggressive, multi-pronged effort to restrict insurance coverage for and reduce access to abortion.” Some states are trying to require women to have unnecessary and invasive procedures before having an abortion. Others are requiring doctors to give women specific information, some of which is inaccurate, under the guise of informed consent. Some are trying to ban abortion completely after twenty weeks or even earlier. Essentially, any obstacle that can be imagined is being proposed for legislation to stop women from being able to access safe legal abortions.

The attack on women’s health needs does not end there. Legislatures are also attempting to ban Planned Parenthood from receiving funding under programs that provide access to health care for poor women. Often, the Planned Parenthood clinic is the sole place these low income women can go for breast cancer, cervical cancer, and other cancer screenings. Planned Parenthood clinics provide Pap smears to women who could not afford to get them elsewhere. Without federal funding for Planned Parenthood services, many women would have nowhere to go to protect their health. While abortions are only a very small part of the medical services Planned Parenthood provides, these law-makers are using abortion as an excuse to attack women’s health.

In reaffirming the commitment that Women of Reform Judaism has to protect women’s reproductive rights, access to health services, and access to safe legal abortion, the Board of Directors calls upon WRJ affiliates to:

1. Monitor their local, state, provincial, and federal legislatures and lobby against efforts to defund Planned Parenthood and/or place more obstacles in the way of women seeking safe legal abortions.
2. Educate their members about the threats to women’s health that are being proposed.
3. Work with their local Planned Parenthood and clinics offering similar services to provide them with volunteer and funding support and advocacy as needed.

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