



Advocacy Update

Sent May 25, 2011

WRJ Board Statement on Reproductive Rights

The Women of Reform Judaism Board of Directors met from May 21st to May 23rd. You will be hearing about the board's important deliberations and decisions in the next few weeks, but we wanted to inform you immediately about the statement issued on reproductive rights and health.

Statement: Board of Directors Meeting, May 2011 Issues in Reproductive Rights and Health

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.

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

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.

Sisterhood leaders, please watch for specific program and action recommendations.

Deadly Storm Ravages Joplin, MO

The devastating storms in the U.S. Southeast and Midwest have continued, just recently sweeping across Joplin, Missouri, causing more than one-hundred deaths, destroying neighborhoods, and leaving thousands homeless. We've heard that some families in the Joplin congregation have lost their homes, but do not yet have definitive information about sisterhood members. When we do, we will send out the information in a special email.

In the meanwhile, the URJ is accepting donations for storm relief efforts and will work closely with Reform congregations in the impacted communities to provide funds where they are most needed.

Donations can be made online to the [URJ Disaster Relief Fund](#). Checks can be sent to the Union for Reform Judaism (Attn: Storm Relief), 633 Third Ave., New York, NY 10017.