

## Reproductive Justice, Where are We Now

With the overturn of Roe V Wade, I consider June 24<sup>th</sup> a tragic day in our country. For those who can become pregnant, for families, for health care providers and for all of us in America considering the broader implications of this Supreme Court decision we all lost that day.

Those who can get pregnant lost a national guarantee of bodily autonomy. Whether you think having an abortion is the morally right thing to do or not, whether you would have an abortion or not or whether you would suggest an abortion as an option to a loved one faced with an unintended pregnancy or not, In time it is expected that half of the states will ban or severely restrict abortion. We with uteruses have been pushed several steps backward on attaining our unrealized right to equality in America. Women's Rights Lost. The majority of SCOTUS, IMHO made a decision that is misogynist, patriarchal, and politically beholden to the religious right. All five were raised in the Catholic Church. They are imposing a decision that is not the will of the majority of the American people. And for the first time SCOTUS overturned one of their previous decisions. The gold standard of precedent just went up in flames. We are just beginning to see the ripples of all this wash over our country.

With respect and consideration for trans men and non-binary I will use the term pregnant people instead of pregnant women.

### **What is Reproductive Justice?**

SisterSong, a national multi-ethnic Reproductive Justice collective, defines Reproductive Justice 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. The term was invented in 1994 by a group of black women in Chicago who recognized that the women's rights movement led by middle class and rich white women could not defend the needs of women of color, other marginalized women and trans people.

RJ is a human right based on the United Nations' internationally-accepted Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that details the rights of individuals and the responsibilities of government to protect those rights. RJ is about access. Abortion being legal is not enough if that choice is not geographically or financially available. RJ is about more than abortion: it includes access to contraception, comprehensive sex education, STI prevention and care, alternative birth options, adequate prenatal and pregnancy care, domestic violence assistance, adequate wages to support our families, adequate child care, safe homes, and so much more.

RJ addresses the intersecting oppressions – women's rights, transgender rights, sexual orientations, racial justice, immigrants' rights, the rights of people with disabilities, the rights of people currently incarcerated, more. Audre Lorde said, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." RJ is about centering the most marginalized, those with the least resources in our policy making so that all have equal access to the resources.....

### **Where are we across the United States on abortion?**

#### **Abortion facts**

- **Nearly 1 in 4 women in the United States will have an abortion by the age of 45,**

- **the availability of safe and legal abortion for nearly 50 years has been a backstop for when contraception fails or is unavailable, sex was nonconsensual as in rape and incest, or a planned pregnancy takes a tragic or dangerous turn because of a serious fetal abnormality or maternal health complications**
- **18% of pregnancies end in abortion**
- **60% of the women are already mothers.**
- **About half are their 20s,**
- **93% done before 13 weeks= 1<sup>st</sup> trimester**
- **Two kinds of abortion – medical or medication abortion and surgical – person’s choice.**
  - **Medical abortion 54% of abortions in 2020 usually mifepristone and misoprostol, at home, increase in medical during the pandemic. Used mostly in the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester,**
  - **Surgical is vacuum aspiration – person is not pregnant when they leave the clinic.**
- **Both are effective and safe - Abortion more than 14x safer than pregnancy**
- **We are a country that has been violent about abortion – clinics bombed and arson, abortion providers murdered – worst in the 1990s**

#### **Abortion access.**

The demise of Roe has put the decisions about abortion into the hands of the individual states. About 25 million women of reproductive age 1 in 3 will now live in states that ban or severely restrict abortion. 13 states have trigger laws that ban abortion now that Roe has been over turned. 8 already in effect, 4 expected to be effective soon. 2 more states (Iowa and Indiana) are expected to soon ban abortion. 5 have abortion bans blocked by courts. About half of the states are expected to allow bans or restrictions. Most in the south & Midwest. Many have no exception for rape or incest. Those that do require victims report to law enforcement. Some states have passed laws that make having an abortion or providing an abortion a crime. Texas has its vigilante law where citizens can take the law into their own hands. For many women abortion access is now hundreds of miles away – and totally beyond their resources. Mississippi -closest access is Illinois.

20 states and Washington DC abortion is legal and is or likely to be protected. NE middle atlantic states and west coast. Some have protections that shield those seeking or providing abortions from laws in other states.

On July 11 the Biden administration told hospitals that they 'must' provide abortion services if the life of the mother is at risk, saying federal law on emergency treatment guidelines preempts state laws in jurisdictions that now ban the procedure without any exceptions following the Supreme Court’s decision.

Even though SCOTUS put the decisions about abortion in the hands of the states, Representative Mike Kelly (R-PA) has introduced HR 705, the so-called Heartbeat Protection Act, to make abortion illegal everywhere. Republicans have blocked an attempt by Senate Democrats to pass a law protecting the right of women to cross state lines to get abortion care.

**Where are we in NYS?** We are lucky to live in NYS where legal abortion has been legislated. Women will come from Ohio and from PA if they ban abortion and further. State lawmakers in 2019 passed the Reproductive Health Act, where abortions are legal even after 24 weeks if a woman's life is in danger or if the fetus is not viable. It also allows licensed or certified health care practitioners to perform the procedure. In June NYS legislature strengthened legal protections for women who travel to New York to receive abortion services as well as the abortion providers. Money has been appropriated to help expand abortion services and support abortion providers. In the first round of applications for that funding, PPGNY was funded. Plus the process to create an amendment to the State constitution to safeguard abortion has been started. Ithaca Common Councils has passed a resolution that makes Ithaca a sanctuary for people coming from out of state for abortion care. The IPD will not cooperate on any investigation.

### **Public Health Crisis**

**The US already has the highest maternal mortality rates among developed countries in spite of spending more money on health care. The highest rates are in southern states, many who have banned abortion.**

**Maternal mortality** - A recent [study](#) estimated that banning abortion in the U.S. would lead to a 21% increase in the number of pregnancy-related deaths overall and a 33% increase among Black women, simply because staying pregnant is more dangerous than having an abortion. Increased deaths due to unsafe abortions or attempted abortions would be in addition.

How the demise of Roe has landed in the world of **maternal health** have revealed chaos and cruelty and lack of appropriate care: Those with miscarriages forced to cramp and bleed for days on end, long after heartbeats disappeared. Doctors paralyzed into inaction, afraid that if they delivered what they knew to be the best medical care, they could face legal repercussions. Pharmacists unwilling to fill prescriptions for drugs that treat miscarriages because they are the same drugs used for abortions.

The simplest and most common treatments for miscarriage are the same as medication and surgical abortions. The result of this is far more women hemorrhaging or having infections and not receiving intervention until there is an immediate threat to their lives. This has already been documented in Texas.

**Who will be harmed** – those with the least resources geographically and financially– black, brown, indigenous, poor, rural. Statement from Black Lives Matter - rulings will harm Black people disproportionately. .... in service of a white supremacist and patriarchal agenda. ....The fall of Roe will open the door to further criminalization of Black people.

**Turnaway Study - 10 years, tracked the experiences of 1000 women who'd received abortions or who had been denied them because of clinic policies on gestational age limits. The group denied abortions had worse mental health, worse physical health (2 women died after delivery), and worse economic situations, more likely to raise children alone, and had lower quality of relationships.**

**Difference between pre and post Roe is Medication abortion** – The thinking has been that the ability to have an abortion with pills that women take at home that essentially induce a miscarriage are going to make access still available to people in states with bans. However states with bans are already going after medication abortion by bills that make it illegal to get pills from out of state. But mail is harder regulate. Many places have access to pills by telehealth.

AID Access was started by a Dutch Physician to make abortion pills available to women all over the world. Abortion on Demand is an organization that makes pills available in states where abortion is still legal. DIY groups making Misoprostol and underground networks have been available in various parts of the country-it is easier to create an underground network with abortion pills.

**Another approach to fighting the abortion bans - The first amendment** guarantees the free exercise of religion. Separation of church and state. A second component, the establishment clause prohibits the government from endorsing some forms of religion and condemning others, or embracing faith-based perspectives on public policy. In fact that is what SCOTUS has just done. So some more liberal religious groups are looking at using the first amendment saying that abortion bans violate their religious convictions. Rabbis and Muslim leaders are suing state governments.

**So how do our UU 7 principles and now 8 principles speak to Reproductive Justice.**

**1st Principle:** The inherent worth and dignity of every person; not when those who can get pregnant do not have their bodily autonomy respected.

**2nd Principle:** Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; There is nothing just, no shred of equality in this Supreme Court decision. The rich will have access, poor less so. Chaos and cruelty have ensued in medical care.

**3rd Principle:** Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations; Even through our differences we all should have the same rights to bodily integrity and the right to make our own decisions from our own beliefs. Now many are bound by the beliefs of the religious right.

**4th Principle:** A free and responsible search for truth and meaning; Supreme Court Justices lied during their confirmation hearings to get themselves appointed. Crisis pregnancy centers lie about false ill effects of abortions. Some states have legislated that doctors who prescribe medication abortion must tell women it is reversible when that is not true. The question of when does life begins

**5th Principle:** The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; There is no democratic process when this decision is not the desire of the majority of the people, nothing democratic about the ill-begotten ways the conservative majority were appointed to the Supreme Court.

**6th Principle:** The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; There is nothing peaceful or just about the legal and medical chaos or the suffering of pregnant people, suffering health care providers caught between their oath to cause no harm and the abortion bans and restrictions that make them fear liability for common medical practices that save lives.

**7th Principle:** Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. I can't believe these justices gave any serious thought to the ripple effects of this ill-begotten decision.

**8th Principle:** Which commits us to action against racism and other oppressions – this to my mind one of those other oppressions – which intersects as it disproportionately affect POC and trans people.

**In all the carrying on about the rights of the unborn child, it's the rights of people who carry the unborn that get erased. Besides the fact that there is no mention of abortion in the Constitution or its 27 Amendments, there is no mention either of the word fetus or**

**unborn. In public policy we get reduced to mere vessels of gestation. Our bodies with the miracle and mystery of our reproductive powers become reduced to political footballs.. Our very spirits get left out - all we are as fully formed human beings with a lived experience, a developed mind. That is not the dignity and worth of every person. This is morally wrong.**

**What can we do -**

**- VOTE**

- support pro-abortion political candidates on every level
- hold legislators accountable in office
- support abortion providers here PP

PP is redeveloping an escort program and programs to support those from out of state

- support abortion funds that pay for abortions and travel expenses
- Press federal legislators for federal laws codifying and protecting abortion- by phone, email, letters.

And support that action in other states

- write letters to the editor
- advocate for quality sex education, access to contraception, education about medication abortion.
- educate yourself about the latest developments, the intersectionality from climate change to LGBTQ to abortion
- protest
- take care of ourselves and support each other

**We must not let people driven by power, and greed, take away our power. It's easy to be overwhelmed and discouraged with all bad news day after day. But as supporters and allies in Reproductive Justice we must keep, maintain, and use our power. In a different way than power is being used against us. Jeff Collins, local Buddhist teacher and wise man, talks of the marriage of love and power. That sounds right to me. That sounds like a way to Reproductive Justice. Join me in taking action.**

**Love and Courage to us all.**