

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS AND WOMEN'S RABBINIC NETWORK RESOLUTION AFFIRMING OUR COMMITMENT TO BROAD, ACCESSIBLE REPRODUCTIVE & SEXUAL HEALTH CARE

April 18, 2024

Since the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) in *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Association* in 2022, a concerted religiously-motivated effort to narrow and eliminate access to abortion, sexual health resources, sex education, and reproductive healthcare in the U.S. increasingly threatens the values of self-determination, health, and religious freedom that Reform Jews hold paramount.^[1] The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) and the Women's Rabbinic Network (WRN) jointly issue this resolution as a clarion call to reaffirm our commitment to reproductive and sexual health care^[2] as a matter of church-state separation.

The Reform Movement has long opposed government interference with the reproductive rights of all individuals, particularly women and pregnant people, including the poor, minors, queer^[3] people, and women of color, who are disproportionately affected by attacks on reproductive rights across the United States.^[4] These attacks are religiously motivated and seek to elevate the restrictions of one faith over the religious teachings of others, including Judaism. As CCAR leadership recently argued, "Reform rabbis do not ask that Jewish law be enshrined in the laws of the United States or any state. We demand, however, that individuals in this free country be permitted to make their own choice" with regard to their reproductive health and capacities.^[5] As the WRN asserts, "People who have the physical power to create, nurture, and give life also have the power to decide when and if it is the right time to do so."^[6]

Halachah (Jewish law) recognizes abortion as a legitimate and necessary form of basic health care for people at all stages of their reproductive capacity. Judaism has long affirmed that the rights and protections of personhood arrive at birth, not

sooner.^[7] Only after delivery is a human classified as person, and even during the birthing process, the life and health of the pregnant person remains a priority.^[8]

Even our ancient Sages, who knew nothing of the broad reproductive technologies that today allow self-determination, informed choice, and medical assistance in sexual and reproductive life, found the mental and physical health of a pregnant person important. They allowed forms of contraception, particularly in the case of the most vulnerable.^[9] Our Reform Movement considers “maternal anguish” legitimate grounds for abortion.^[10] Additionally, experts like the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists note that abortion is crucial to the health of child bearers and is necessitated by common challenges like “contraceptive failure, barriers to contraceptive use and access, rape, incest, intimate partner violence, fetal anomalies, illness during pregnancy, and exposure to teratogenic,” that is, medications that can cause developmental malformations.^[11]

We are deeply alarmed by the increase in so-called “moral” judicial arguments grounded in a narrow interpretation of certain religious beliefs, alongside a trend in decreasing services to women, pregnant people, queer people, and children in favor of legislative and judicial interventions that attempt to grant personhood to embryos and fetuses. Those who oppose the expansion of reproductive rights and the self-determination of pregnant people, with the supportive expertise of medical professionals, often disdain helpful advances and expansions of freedom as “new” and “unprecedented.” We would do well to remember that the systematic exclusion of women, people of color, and queer folks contributed to the restrictions of the past.

The Reform Movement is one of increasing inclusion, honoring the rights of all persons, created in God’s image. We are a movement that opposes sexism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and racism in all their forms.

Above all, Reform Judaism affirms moral agency. God gives each of us the capacity to make informed Jewish decisions that set the course of our lives. As opposed to anti-abortion religious leaders and politicians who broadly seek to impose their religious restrictions into the private lives of pregnant people, we uphold and seek to protect decisions about whether, when, and how to become a parent as a private, personal decision between the child bearer and their health care provider, and anyone else that person seeks into include in their deliberation, such as their friends, family, and their clergy. The government must not enter these personal deliberations, except to protect safety.

THEREFORE, the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Women's Rabbinic Network call on our members and the communities we serve in the United States to:

1. Continually affirm the legal right of a pregnant person to make their own informed, medically guided choice to carry or terminate a particular pregnancy, free from government interference; the right to access birth control; and the right to comprehensive, medically accurate, and LGBTQ+ inclusive sex education;
2. Advocate for laws and policies that make medically accurate, religiously unbiased abortion, reproductive health care, and sex education affordable and accessible;
3. Destigmatize abortion by sharing our stories and/or empowering others to share their stories in appropriate forums;
4. Educate ourselves on the status of reproductive care in our states and communities, participating in campaigns to enhance reproductive justice whenever possible;
5. Provide accurate information to those seeking contraception, sex education, and abortion care according to the Reform Jewish values outlined in this resolution;
6. Contact Members of Congress and urge them to support:
 - a. the EACH Act, to repeal the Hyde Amendment and eliminate the financial barrier to reproductive care;
 - b. the Women's Health Protection Act, to create a federal safeguard against state bans and restrictions that obstruct or delay access to care; and
 - c. the Right to Contraception Act, to codify an individual's right to access contraception and for healthcare providers to provide them;
7. Support the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution, which would correct the inequality and exclusions of women and people assigned female at birth embedded in U.S. legal precedents.
8. Support state-level efforts that seek to protect and strengthen access to the range of reproductive care services and medically accurate information;
9. Affirm the moral calling of nurses, doctors, and other providers of abortion care, gender-affirming care, and reproductive services, and call for their protection; and
10. Work to ensure access to abortion, gender-affirming care, and reproductive services for those in states impacted by abortion bans and other restrictions on reproductive freedom.^[12]

-
1. While the values underlying this Resolution pertain to all locations in which members of the CCAR serve, the particular concerns expressed herein refer to specific challenges currently facing our colleagues and the communities they serve in the United States. ↑
 2. We include in our definition of “reproductive and sexual health care” both endocrinological treatment pertaining to the human biological system regulating hormones and sexual education, which is crucial to understanding one’s own health. ↑
 3. We include in our expansive definition of “queer”: transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer, lesbian, gay bisexual, and intersex people. ↑
 4. For example, the Women of Reform Judaism issued its statement, “Judaism and the Family” in 1965, calling for abortion access before the 1973 landmark case *Roe v Wade* guaranteed abortion rights, until *Roe* itself was overturned in 2022:
<https://www.wrj.org/sites/default/files/WRJ%20R%26S%201965%20Judaism%20and%20the%20Family.pdf>. The Central Conference of American Rabbis has adopted resolutions on abortion and reproductive rights in 1967, 1975, and 1980 (see <https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/resolution/>); on women’s health in 1992 and 1993 (see <https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/resolution/>); on the medical use of fetal tissue in 1993 (<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-resolutions/fetal-tissue-medical-use-1993/>); and on state restrictions to reproductive care in 1995 (<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-resolutions/state-restrictions-on-access-to-reproductive-health-services/>). The CCAR Resolution, “Affirming Our Commitment to Women’s Rights,” predecessor of this current resolution, was adopted in 2017: <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-resolutions/affirming-our-commitment-womens-rights/>. ↑
 5. Rabbi Erica Asch, President, and Rabbi Hara Person, Chief Executive, “Central Conference of American Rabbis Condemns Alabama Supreme Court Ruling on the Status of Embryos,” February 26, 2024.
<https://www.ccarnet.org/central-conference-of-american-rabbis-condemns-alabama-supreme-court-ruling-on-the-status-of-embryos/> ↑
 6. Women’s Rabbinic Network, “Abortion Care Is Health Care. Forcing Someone To Carry A Pregnancy Violates Jewish Law And Constitutional Rights,” June 24, 2022: ↑
 7. *Sh’mot* (Exodus) 21:22–23; *Mishnah Arachin* 1:4; *Mishnah Ohalot* 7.6; *Y’vamos* 69b; Central Conference of American Rabbis, Responsa Committee, “In Vitro

fertilization and the Status of the Embryo," 1997:

<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/rr21-no-5757-2/>. ↑

8. Central Conference of American Rabbis, Responsa Committee, "In Vitrofertilization and the Status of the Embryo," 1997:
<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/rr21-no-5757-2/>. ↑
9. Babylonian Talmud, *Y'vamot* 12b. ↑
10. Central Conference of American Rabbis, Responsa Committee, "Abortion to Save Siblings from Suffering," 1995:
<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/tfn-no-5755-13-171-176/>. We acknowledge that the term "maternal" might better be rendered to include any gestational carrier. ↑
11. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, "Facts Are Important: Abortion Is Healthcare," <https://www.acog.org/advocacy/facts-are-important/abortion-is-healthcare>. ↑
12. For more ways to take action to protect abortion access, please visit the Religious Action Center of the Reform Movement: <https://rac.org/blog/path-forward-abortion-resource-guide>. ↑

Copyright Information

Copyright © Central Conference of American Rabbis