



# Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry

A voice for justice, equality and compassion in New Jersey

## *Speaking out on Reproductive Justice*

### **Policy Brief: Healthcare: Reproductive Justice**

**Position:** The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of New Jersey, representing the Unitarian Universalist congregations in New Jersey, supports healthcare and reproductive justice for all women. Reproductive justice, a concept put forth by coalitions of women of color, promotes the right of all women to have children, not to have children, and to raise their children in safe and healthy environments.

The foundation for the UULMNJ's support for reproductive justice is rooted in the Unitarian Universalist principle that affirms and promotes the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We value life and the consciences of individuals, and we are called to protect and affirm the lives of women when it comes to their reproductive choices.

The right to have children, not to have children, and to parent children in safe and healthy environments is a basic human right and we call upon our legislators to ensure that equitable, accessible, and affordable health services are provided to all of New Jersey's residents.

#### **Background**

- The Unitarian Universalist involvement in the cause of reproductive justice began fifty years ago due to the issue being aligned with UU principles and being a core Human Rights issue. UU's have been on the frontline of women's reproductive rights and anti-racism work for decades. The goal of the "reproductive rights/choice" framework is the protection of a woman's right to reproductive health care services, particularly contraceptives and abortion.
- The legal basis for women's reproductive rights emerges from the right to privacy (Roe v. Wade, U.S. Supreme Court, 1973). Attendant to the social inequalities which impact health disparities and shape the lives of marginalized women, the "reproductive justice" framework evolved from "reproductive rights" and was first created by women of color to work against "reproductive oppression" – the exploitation of women, girls, and others through their reproduction, labor and sexuality. Reproductive justice has four goals: (a) the raising of children in safe and healthy environments, (b) planned and healthy pregnancies, (c) ending or avoidance of unwanted pregnancies, and (d) expression of sexuality. It works to address the myriad issues facing women in the context of their reproductive lives.

#### **Priorities**

1. The Task Force is focusing first on ensuring safe and affordable reproductive health care services, access to safe, legal abortions, reduction of unnecessary cesarean section births, choice in birthing methods, and healthy sexuality education. The task

force will monitor any proposed abortion restrictions as well as any proposed restrictions on birth control and other reproductive health services. In addition, the task force will monitor court cases that limit rights of pregnant women, especially those most vulnerable to state control and punishment – low income women, women of color and drug-using women.

2. Even though New Jersey has minimal restrictions on abortion access, abortion clinic staff, their patients and companions must endure verbal abuse and demonstrations from anti-abortion activists while trying to enter clinics. This difficult scenario can be found at abortion clinics across the state. In order to provide emotional support and physical security for patients and their companions as they enter the facilities the Task Force supports clinic defense programs and advocates for municipal buffer zones where appropriate.

3. The Task Force seeks to ensure that all women, regardless of their socioeconomic background and status, are able to access safe, legal and affordable abortions and birth control – both in the present day and in the future. Abortions in New Jersey are currently legal from first trimester through second trimester and the cost of an abortion can be prohibitive. Many women do not have insurance and are often unemployed and in difficult economic circumstances. The Task Force will work to gather support from congregations in putting pressure on the New Jersey Legislature and Governor to reinstate funding for women’s healthcare and family planning.

“Reproductive justice does not isolate or pit important social issues against each other, rather it works to promote these rights across many areas including: eradication of violence against women; comprehensive sex education; abortion rights and access; discrimination based on race and sexual orientation; economic justice; environmental justice; and immigration justice.” The Unitarian Universalist Association

**The achievement of reproductive** justice requires a paradigm shift in consciousness for many people and radical transformation of society. As a long-term change strategy, reproductive justice requires resources and sustained organizing and momentum.

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