

National Council of Jewish Women Testimony
Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Health, United States
House of Representatives
Protecting Women's Access to Reproductive Health Care
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Beatrice Kahn
President

Sheila Katz
Chief Executive Officer

2055 L Street NW
Suite 650
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202 296 2588
action@ncjw.org

www.ncjw.org

The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is a grassroots organization of 90,000 advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms. These values teach us to respect the dignity and decision of all people and, as such, we aim to create a world where everyone — regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, immigration status, or any other arbitrary factor — is able to control their body, sexuality, and future.

Since our founding in 1893, NCJW has supported access to family planning and reproductive health care. NCJW was an early advocate for safe and legal abortion, and we continue our advocacy today at the local, state, and national levels through 60 sections and action teams across the country as well as a strong State Policy Advocacy network in 16 states. Consistent with the Jewish value of pursuing *tzedek* (justice) for all, NCJW firmly opposes laws that have created a patchwork of abortion access and pushed basic health care out of reach for those living in poverty and in rural areas, people of color, LGBTQ people, and young people.

Indeed, state lawmakers introduced a staggering 304 abortion restrictions in the first three months of 2019 alone, escalating attacks that have produced over 450 laws constraining access to reproductive health care since 2011. These medically unnecessary regulations increase costs, decrease efficiency and number of providers, and delay procedures, negatively impacting the quality of safe and legal abortion and shuttering clinics. Further, an individual's power to make their own, faith-informed decisions is obstructed when they are required to receive inaccurate or misleading information or clinically unnecessary services like ultrasounds, in-person counseling, and waiting periods.

In this way, laws and regulations limiting access to abortion are at odds with our nation's founding principle of religious liberty and trample individual moral agency. Judaism traditionally teaches that the fetus only has the status of personhood at the onset of labor and childbirth. Policies granting "fetal personhood" rights or establishing that "life" begins at conception are contrary to these teachings and violate the First Amendment's Establishment Clause by enshrining one religious view into law. Furthermore, Jewish law not only permits abortion but requires it when the life of the pregnant individual is at risk. Therefore, laws restricting access to abortion directly impede Jews' ability to practice Judaism, further violating the Establishment Clause, while simultaneously infringing upon the constitutional right to privacy found in the Fourteenth Amendment.

NCJW endorses and resolves to work for the protection of every person's right to bodily autonomy and the elimination of all obstacles to reproductive freedom. This is why we

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support the Women's Health Protection Act (HR 2975/S 1649), legislation safeguarding access to high-quality care and securing constitutional rights by protecting patients and providers from political interference. The bill guarantees providers an affirmative statutory right to deliver abortion care without limitations that are more burdensome than those imposed on medically comparable procedures, do not significantly advance patient health or the safety of abortion, or make abortion more difficult to access. As the Supreme Court is set to review its own abortion precedent in *June Medical Services v. Gee* and as states across the country work to legislate abortion rights out of existence, it is time for Congress to step in to ensure that every single person has equal access to the full range of reproductive health services without delays, judgment, or misinformation.

NCJW looks forward to working with the Committee to advance the Women's Health Protection Act. Thank you for holding a hearing on this critical legislation and for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please contact Shannon Russell, Legislative Counsel, at srussell@ncjw.org.