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February 12, 2020
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Reform Jewish Movement's support of H.R. 2975, the Women's Health Protection Act

Dear Chairman Pallone, Chairwoman Eshoo, Ranking Member Burgess, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose nearly 850 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2,000 Reform rabbis, and Women of Reform Judaism, a representative of thousands of Reform Jewish women in hundreds of women's groups in North America and around the world, we write to convey our strong support for H.R. 2975, the Women's Health Protection Act. We are grateful to the leadership of the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Energy and Commerce for holding today's hearing.

Federal action is required to address the draconian surge in anti-abortion legislation sweeping across the country. In the last decade alone, state legislators have enacted over 450 state laws restricting access to abortion services. The Women's Health Protection Act would put a stop to these coordinated attacks on abortion access by creating a federal safeguard against the unrelenting spate of bans, obstacles, and medically unnecessary restrictions that delay or obstruct access to care.

Our support of the Women's Health Protection Act is rooted in the Reform Jewish Movement's historic commitment to ensuring every individual's right to access the full range of reproductive health services, including abortion. Our



The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Reform Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.





advocacy for this bill is inspired by the core Jewish value kavod ha'briyot, respect for individual dignity.

Though state governments have slowly been chipping away at the constitutional right to an abortion granted by *Roe v. Wade* for the past 47 years, the extreme nature of these restrictions has intensified in recent months and years. In 2019, nine states passed blatantly unconstitutional state laws banning abortion, most before many individuals even learn they are pregnant.

In 27 states across the country, pregnant patients are effectively required to make two separate trips to the clinic in order to obtain an abortion due to mandatory waiting periods between the time they receive counseling and have the procedure. These waiting periods disproportionately impact low-income patients, people of color, young people, and rural Americans, many of whom live several hours from the nearest abortion clinic. Millions of individuals living in states with these restrictive laws already must drive hours to the nearest clinic, paying for hotels, piecing together childcare, and risking the consequences of missing work or school. Requiring two separate trips exacerbates the financial and logistical hurdles these individuals already must navigate.

In addition to establishing the statutory right for patients to receive abortion care free of medically unnecessary barriers and bans, the Women's Health Protection Act is a necessary step to protect health care providers from the onslaught of restrictive state laws that prevent them from doing their job.

The passage of targeted regulation of abortion provider (TRAP) laws are often presented under the guise of protecting patient safety. Yet in reality, these restrictions are medically unnecessary, and instead harm patients and delay care. Across the country, hundreds of clinics unable to comply with these onerous provisions have been forced to close and providers are continuously denied the ability to provide necessary medical care to their patients.

The Shulchan Aruch, the most widely consulted code of Jewish law, describes the sacred nature of a physician's duties: "The Torah has granted the physician permission to heal, and it is a religious duty which comes under the rule of saving an endangered life. If he withholds treatment, he is regarded as one who sheds blood" (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 336:1). Inspired by the sacred duty described in this teaching, we are committed to advocating for abortion access



and opposed to regressive state laws that prevent medical providers from providing safe, legal abortion.

As Reform Jewish clergy and people of faith, we are proud to support the Women’s Health Protection Act because we believe in protecting the dignity and moral agency of pregnant people and their medical providers. A person’s reproductive health care options should not be dictated by their geographic location or their income. We believe this bill is an important step in assuring that the right to an abortion remains accessible and attainable for all.

We commend the leadership of the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Energy and Commerce for holding a hearing on this critical legislation and urge the Committee to support the swift passage of the Women’s Health Protection Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Marla Feldman'.

Rabbi Marla Feldman
Executive Director, Women of Reform Judaism

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Jonah'.

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner
Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism