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AAJC

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April 11, 2023

SUPPORT H.R. 12, THE WOMEN'S HEALTH PROTECTION ACT OF 2023

Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 230 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and the 101 undersigned organizations, we write in support of H.R. 12, the Women's Health Protection Act of 2023. **The Women's Health Protection Act is an important step towards reproductive justice, which emphasizes the structural inequality and discrimination underlying bans and restrictions on abortion. We urge all members to lend your strong support in favor of the bill and to call for its immediate passage.**

This issue is one of grave urgency for the civil and human rights community and for people across the United States. As you know, the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* took away the constitutional right to abortion established in *Roe v. Wade*,¹ and it paved the way for states to ban abortion outright or effectively eliminate access, disproportionately harming people of color. Since the decision, roughly 14.8 million women of reproductive age face new barriers to abortion access because they live in states that are certain or likely to ban abortion, including 5.8 million Black women, 6.5 million Latinas, 1.3 million Asian women, 34,300 Pacific Islander women, 285,500 Native American women, and 908,200 multiracial women.² We have arrived at this perilous moment after a decades-long campaign by wealthy and powerful interests to rig the judiciary and stack our courts with extremists,³ including Supreme Court justices selected with the express purpose of overturning decades of legal precedent and ending legal abortion.⁴

¹ The right was reaffirmed in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992). Nina Totenberg, "Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade*, ending right to abortion upheld for decades," *NPR*. June 24, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/24/1102305878/supreme-court-abortion-roe-v-wade-decision-overturn>.

² Katherine Gallagher Robbins and Shaina Goodman, "State Abortion Bans Could Harm Nearly 15 Million Women of Color," *National Partnership for Women & Families*. July 2022. <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/reports/state-abortion-bans-harm-woc.html>.

³ Michael Scherer, Josh Dawsey, Caroline Kitchener, and Rachel Roubein, "A 49-year crusade: Inside the movement to overturn *Roe v. Wade*," *The Washington Post*. May 7, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/05/07/abortion-movement-roe-wade/>.

⁴ Mark Berman, "Trump promised judges who would overturn *Roe v. Wade*," *The Washington Post*. March 21, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2017/live-updates/trump-white-house/neil-gorsuch-confirmation-hearings-updates-and-analysis-on-the-supreme-court-nominee/trump-promised-judges-who-would-overturn-roe-v-wade/>.

Immediate congressional action is needed to protect the ability of people who can become pregnant to control their own bodies, lives, and futures.

By protecting abortion access from medically unnecessary restrictions that obstruct the right of all persons to obtain safe, legal abortion services, the Women’s Health Protection Act (WHPA) seeks to counter the onslaught of state-level abortion bans and restrictions that cause significant and sometimes insurmountable challenges to receiving abortion care. These restrictions disproportionately impact the ability of low-income people, people of color, and disabled people to access health care, robs pregnant people of bodily autonomy, and threatens the economic security of families and individuals, many of whom are already struggling to get by.

The findings laid out in H.R. 12 ground the bill in a vision of reproductive justice — the human right to maintain bodily autonomy, to have children, to not have children, and to parent the children we have in safe and supportive communities.⁵ The findings highlight the white supremacist and misogynistic roots of abortion restrictions and bans and recognize that all people with the capacity for pregnancy, including transgender people, nonbinary individuals, and others, are harmed by restrictions on abortion services. Equitable access to abortion care — everywhere — is essential to social and economic participation and reproductive autonomy. We know that laws that restrict access to abortion cause the most harm to those people who, because of structural racism, ableism, and discrimination, already have limited access to resources, already struggle to achieve economic security, and already face sometimes life-threatening health disparities. At the most basic level, restrictive abortion laws are aimed at controlling who can exercise their rights and who can claim agency over their bodies. These laws perpetuate systems of oppression and prevent the full enjoyment of civil and human rights, and Congress must recognize them as such. We urge you to support WHPA and call for its immediate passage in order to address these systemic inequalities and codify federal protections for abortion rights at this critical moment.

Since the *Dobbs* decision, anti-abortion lawmakers across the nation have been emboldened to push for abortion bans, showing they will stop at nothing to control people’s personal health care decisions. Despite large public support for access to abortion,⁶ it is now criminalized in 12 states.⁷ Additionally, state lawmakers have introduced dangerous legislation that restricts access to medication abortion, imposes medically unnecessary restrictions on abortion clinics, or singles out abortion providers for burdensome restrictions not applied to other health care providers.⁸ Access to abortion for many people was severely limited even before the *Dobbs* decision, and anti-abortion lawmakers have now been emboldened to curtail our rights even further.

⁵ H.R. 12, Women’s Health Protection Act of 2023. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/12>.

⁶ “Nearly 7 in 10 support state-level ballot measures on abortion,” *Ipsos*. Jan. 22, 2023. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/nearly-7-10-support-state-level-ballot-measures-abortion>.

⁷ “After Roe Fell: Abortion Laws by State,” *Center for Reproductive Rights*. Accessed March 27, 2023. <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/abortion-laws-by-state/>.

⁸ “100 Days Post-Roe: At Least 66 Clinics Across 15 US States Have Stopped Offering Abortion Care,” *Guttmacher Institute*. Oct. 6, 2022. <https://www.guttmacher.org/2022/10/100-days-post-roe-least-66-clinics-across-15-us-states-have-stopped-offering-abortion-care>.

The anniversary of the *Roe* decision on January 22, 2023, which would have marked 50 years of legal access to abortion, is a stark reminder that restrictions and bans on abortion are a threat to the economic security, health, and dignity of low-income people, women of color, immigrants, LGBTQ individuals, people with disabilities, and others who — because of a history of structural inequality and discrimination — already have difficulty accessing reproductive health care services.⁹ These laws contribute to clinic closures and abortion deserts, which increase the costs of obtaining an abortion and build on the systemic inequality already faced by communities of color who have diminished access to resources to overcome financial obstacles to accessing care. For instance, Black women are half as likely to be able to travel 25 to 50 miles for abortion care than White women, who tend to have more financial resources, information, and social networks that allow them to travel.¹⁰ Further, restrictions on accessing abortion, in addition to public funding bans, mean that low-income people and many people of color have to choose between receiving abortion care and paying their rent, purchasing food, or paying for other basic necessities.

People who are denied abortions are more likely to experience poor health outcomes, including maternal death, as compared to people who receive abortions — a trend that is particularly concerning for Black women, who are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than White women.¹¹ People with disabilities encounter increased risks of pregnancy-related complications and maternal mortality.¹² And those who are denied an abortion and forced to bear a child are also four times more likely to fall into poverty, which extends to their children’s economic circumstances and perpetuates cycles of poverty across generations.¹³ Conversely, abortion access has been shown to increase women’s participation in the workforce, particularly for Black women, and has led to gains in educational attainment.¹⁴

The Women’s Health Protection Act would work toward a future where all of us are free to make the personal decisions that shape our lives, our futures, and our families. The bill is an important step in ending these harmful laws and promoting the health, economic security, and well-being of those who have been historically marginalized by racist, ableist, and discriminatory laws and policies. With so much on the line, Congress must act decisively to protect our rights.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Please contact Peggy Ramin, policy counsel for health care and poverty, at ramin@civilrights.org with any questions.

⁹ Usha Ranji et. al., “Beyond the Numbers: Access to Reproductive Health Care for Low-Income Women in Five Communities,” *Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Management Associates*. Nov. 14, 2019. <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/report/beyond-the-numbers-access-to-reproductive-health-care-for-low-income-women-in-five-communities>.

¹⁰ Liza Fuentes and Jenna Jerman, “Distance Traveled to Obtain Clinical Abortion Care in the United States and Reasons for Clinic Choice,” *Journal of Women’s Health*. Dec. 28, 2019. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31282804>.

¹¹ “Working Together to Reduce Black Maternal Mortality,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Apr. 6, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/features/maternal-mortality/index.html>.

¹² “NIH study suggests women with disabilities have higher risk of birth complications and death,” *National Institutes of Health*. Dec. 15, 2021. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/nih-study-suggests-women-disabilities-have-higher-risk-birth-complications-death>.

¹³ Jennifer Ludden, “Women who are denied abortions risk falling deeper into poverty. So do their kids,” *NPR*. May 26, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/26/1100587366/banning-abortion-roe-economic-consequences>.

¹⁴ Kelly Jones and Anna Bernstein, “The Economic Effects of Abortion Access: A Review of the Evidence,” *Institute for Women’s Policy Research*. July 2019. <https://iwpr.org/publications/economic-effects-abortion-access-fact-sheet>.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
AIDS United
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association of University Women
American Atheists
American Federation of Teachers
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF)
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Care in Action
Caring Across Generations
Catholics for Choice
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Reproductive Rights
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
Coalition of Labor Union Women
Community Catalyst
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated
DemCast USA
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities
Equal Justice Society
Equal Rights Advocates
Equality California
Family Equality
Family Values @ Work
Feminist Majority Foundation
Golden State Opportunity
Health Care Voices
Human Rights Campaign
Impetus - Let's Get Started LLC
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Indivisible
Japanese American Citizens League
Justice for Migrant Women

Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
Lambda Legal
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of Conservation Voters
Legal Momentum, the Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund
MomsRising
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc.
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association (NAAPIMHA)
National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse
National Association of Social Workers
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans
National Council of Jewish Women
National Domestic Workers Alliance
National Employment Law Project
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Immigration Law Center
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
National Women's Political Caucus
NextGen America
Oxfam America
Partners In Health
People For the American Way
PFLAG National
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA)
Power to Decide
Prevention Institute
Protect Our Care
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Public Justice
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
Safe States Alliance
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Sexual Violence Prevention Association (SVPA)
Silver State Equality
South Asian Public Health Association
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
Supermajority
Take Back the Court Action Fund
The Advocates for Human Rights
The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
The National Domestic Violence Hotline
The Secular Coalition for America
The Workers Circle
True Colors United
Union for Reform Judaism
USOW
Virginia Organizing
Women Employed
Women of Reform Judaism
Young Invincibles