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In Advance of Supreme Court Arguments, Faith Communities Urge Justices to Protect Abortion Access

WASHINGTON, DC – March 1, 2016 – Because people of faith care about access to abortion, and recognize that women of color, immigrant women, young people, and individuals struggling to make ends meet are most harmed by barriers like those challenged in the US Supreme Court case, *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*, several faith organizations participated in a [National Weekend of Prayer for Reproductive Justice](#), and will [rally this week](#) to protect abortion access. In January, 17 faith-based organizations and nearly 1300 religious leaders joined [an amicus brief](#) urging the US Supreme Court to protect abortion access in *Whole Women's Health*. This case, to be heard by the court on March 2, challenges provisions of a Texas law that place unnecessary and burdensome requirements on abortion providers.

For many religiously affiliated organizations, clergy, and lay people of faith, protecting a woman's constitutional right to make her own moral decision about abortion, as affirmed by the Supreme Court more than four decades ago in *Roe v. Wade*, is critical to ensuring women's health and safety. Faith leaders are also united in respect for diverse beliefs about abortion — and for that reason believe each person must have the ability to make such a deeply personal decision for themselves, without political interference.

As **Nancy K. Kaufman, CEO of the National Council of Jewish Women** stated, "National Council of Jewish Women participated in the National Weekend of Prayer for Reproductive Justice because we believe every person must be free to make their own faith-informed decisions about their body, health, and future, including in decisions about abortion. Clinic shutdown laws impede this vision of justice by eroding women's basic human rights to bodily autonomy and personal decision making, falling hardest on women struggling to make ends meet, women of color, and immigrant women with far-reaching consequences." Kaufman added, "As Jews, we will not stand by while barriers to health care place anyone's moral agency, health, or basic rights at risk; rather, we will rally to protect abortion access."

Jon O'Brien, president of Catholics for Choice said, "As Catholics, we believe women have the moral autonomy to make their own decisions about whether and when to have children. Restrictions that either prevent or make it difficult for women to get the care they need are an affront to the Catholic social justice tradition. Access to abortion shouldn't be limited by where you live, where you work, or how much money you have in your pocket. Protecting access to abortion is the moral thing to do."

“As Unitarian Universalist women, we have steadfastly affirmed the inherent worth and dignity and the right of conscience of all women to make the decision about whether or when to have a child,” says **Kirstie Lewis, president of the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation**. Lewis added, “This Texas law, which has nearly closed all the clinics providing pregnancy termination there, as much as denies this human right.”

Elizabeth Raider, National President, and Marcia J. Weiss, National Vice President, of NA'AMAT USA affirmed, “NA'AMAT USA strongly supports women's health and the right of women to choose legal abortion without the burden of unnecessary hurdles that impede that right.”

Many faith traditions call individuals to stand for the rights and personal decision making of women, the poor, and other marginalized communities who face inequitable access to key services, including abortion.

Chett Pritchett, Executive Director for Methodist Federation for Social Action highlighted, “From our founding, the Methodist Federation for Social Action has been a voice to the poor and marginalized. Our advocacy for reproductive health, choice, and justice firmly upholds that access to reproductive health options, including abortion, must be available to all people, not just those with economic means. With our historic emphasis on economic justice for all people, we find any restrictions on full health care for all women, including access to safe and legal abortions, unacceptable. The Court has an opportunity to see this law as burdensome, as it creates a barrier to care for poor women, immigrant women, and women of color.”

“A woman’s access to health care, including abortion, should not be determined by her economic status,” said **Katey Zeh, Board Chair of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice**. “Whatever politicians may or may not feel about abortion, they should not exercise their power to deny a woman’s health coverage just because she’s poor. Targeting poor and working class families is wrong. Women who have fewer resources shouldn’t have inferior abortion care,” Zeh added.

Rev. Dr. Debra Haffner, president and CEO of the Religious Institute stated, "Abortion is always a moral decision, and we cannot allow those who would deny people their reproductive rights to claim that theirs is the moral response. The sin is not abortion but forced childbearing. The sin is denying people contraception, reproductive healthcare, and sexuality education. The sin is denying poor women, women of color, women in rural communities the same access to safe, accessible medical services that more privileged women have. The sins are poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. The sin is ignoring the lives and needs of children who are already born for food, clean water, housing, health care, good education, and for their parents, support and good paying jobs. We pray for a world where all people have the right to make their own private reproductive decisions and obtain safe, legal, and accessible abortion services."

The Rev. Peter Morales, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association said, “Unitarian Universalism has a long history of supporting a broad spectrum of women’s rights including making one’s own decision about a pregnancy. In Texas, lawmakers infringed on the dignity of women who seek access to safe and affordable abortion services by enacting a restrictive law that disproportionately affects the most vulnerable and marginalized among us. As president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, I join with other faith leaders in calling on the US Supreme Court to vote to uphold human rights and reproductive justice and to reverse the Fifth Circuit Court’s decision.”

Lori Weinstein, CEO of Jewish Women International (JWI) also stated, “Every woman deserves the right to make private health decisions according to the dictates of her own faith and conscience, and

not be restricted by extreme anti-choice laws. We know that the burden of these dangerous laws falls disproportionately on low-income women, who are struggling to make ends meet, support their children, and rise out of poverty.” Weinstein continued, “Access to comprehensive reproductive health care allows a woman to plan her family, build her economic security, and pursue her goals. It’s time for the Supreme Court to put a stop to these extreme laws and ensure that every woman has the care she needs to build a healthy and secure future.”

As the Supreme Court hears *Whole Women’s Health v. Hellerstedt* on March 2, people of faith and religious leaders will be present to stand with women and families most harmed by the Texas law, which has shut down nearly half of all abortion clinics in the state. Together reproductive health and justice advocates, clergy, lay leaders, and representatives of national religious organizations will join the Rally to Protect Abortion Access to support continued access to abortion care and to show that people of faith are allies in the movement to ensure abortion rights.

The following organizations sponsored the National Weekend of Prayer for Reproductive Justice, in advance of oral arguments: Religious Institute (lead sponsor); Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA); National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW); Just Texas: Faith Voices for Reproductive Justice; MCC Global Justice Institute; Metropolitan Community Churches; Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation; Unitarian Universalist Women and Religion; Unitarian Universalist Association; and the National LGBTQ Task Force.

[Methodist Federation for Social Action](#) (MFSA) mobilizes clergy and laity within The United Methodist Church to take action on issues of peace, poverty and people’s rights within the church, the nation and the world.

The [National Council of Jewish Women](#) (NCJW) is a grassroots organization of volunteers and 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. More information on [Facebook](#) and on [Twitter at @NCJW](#).

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