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## **New Jerseyans Need the Reproductive Freedom Act Now**

*Advocates across the state call on lawmakers to pass the bill expeditiously to ensure rights, equity, and access*

Thrive NJ, a coalition of advocates across the state, calls on lawmakers to pass the Reproductive Freedom Act (S3030/A4848). An increasingly hostile Supreme Court threatens to strip not only financial and logistic access to comprehensive essential reproductive health care, including birth control and abortion, but the legal rights themselves. New Jersey must act quickly and decisively to continue its leadership as a champion of these rights and access to reproductive health care. People and communities must be empowered to make decisions about their essential health care without interference from politicians, and without economic and logistical obstacles.

It has been one year since Governor Murphy declared in his 2020 State of the State address that New Jersey must protect the "fundamental and constitutional right to full reproductive freedom." At the 2021 State of the State address today, Governor Murphy once again reiterated his commitment – "No matter what happens in Washington, we are working to protect a woman's full reproductive rights as a matter of state law." To achieve this goal, the Reproductive Freedom Act was introduced in October. Since then, the federal outlook has only gotten bleaker with the confirmation of Justice Amy Coney Barrett to the United States Supreme Court. Before the Supreme Court eviscerates *Roe v. Wade*, New Jersey must take the steps necessary to guarantee reproductive rights.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has spotlighted existing healthcare disparities, created and perpetuated by structural racism. Low-income communities, communities of color, and immigrant communities (many of which overlap) are disproportionately impacted. Loss of income and health insurance conspire to push time-sensitive care like abortion entirely out of reach. These obstacles and crises create an urgent need for immediate action to not only protect reproductive rights, but ensure equitable access. Forward-thinking policy like the Reproductive Freedom Act will demonstrate that New Jersey is committed to reproductive health care for all.

"In the Reproductive Justice movement, we recognize that the social reality of inequity – issues of economic justice, the environment, immigrants' rights, disability rights, discrimination based on race and sexual orientation, and a host of other community-centered concerns – cannot be separated from an individual's health care decision-making process," **said Anjali Mehrotra, President, National Organization for Women of New Jersey.** "Progress is fragile and the events of the past week at the nation's capital have further demonstrated the vulnerabilities of our institutions at the federal level. The Reproductive Freedom Act is an important step towards delivering equitable reproductive health care for all New Jerseyans."

"As an organization, we have been working on behalf of women, children and families for more than 100 years," **said Phoebe Pollinger, Chair of the Reproductive Rights Committee of the Essex County section of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW).** "Our efforts on behalf of social justice are well-reflected in the Reproductive Freedom Act which provides for equal access to the full array of reproductive healthcare and ensures bodily autonomy and personal

decision making free from barriers, fear or interference. NCJW/Essex proudly supports the passage of the RFA."

"With abortion rights at risk across the country, the legislature has the opportunity to pass a comprehensive reproductive health bill, which guarantees reproductive health services will be available and affordable to individuals that need them," **said Marcia Marley of BlueWaveNJ.** "This access is needed now. By passing this important legislation, NJ will ensure equitable access to the full range of services that are essential for women's economic equality, well-being and health."

"We at UU FaithAction NJ are proud to stand in a long line of religious individuals and groups who across generations and faiths support initiatives like the Reproductive Freedom Act," **said Rev. Rob Gregson, Executive Director, Unitarian Universalist FaithAction NJ.** "We call for the RFA to be debated and then passed into law swiftly in New Jersey, ensuring that the fundamental right to decide for oneself and one's family the most intimate and delicate decisions about health, dignity and one's own body remain the prerogative of each New Jerseyan--not shackled by a philosophy foreign to one's own conscience."

We call upon our leaders in the State Senate and Assembly to join the Governor and take a stand against these injustices by advancing the Reproductive Freedom Act. The first step is hearing the bill in committee, which they must do in a timely manner. We must ensure important reproductive health-care protections for all New Jerseyans, especially those in marginalized communities and those that have borne the brunt of the pandemic. We call on our representatives to recognize the urgency of need, and commit to enacting the Reproductive Freedom Act expediently.

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Media Contact Anjali Mehrotra | [president@nownj.org](mailto:president@nownj.org) | 908-456-8081

Benjamin Glaser | [benjamin.glaser@ppgannj.org](mailto:benjamin.glaser@ppgannj.org) | 201-396-1149