

TEMPLE BETH OR STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF ABORTION ACCESS

April 22, 2023

The Temple Beth Or Board of Trustees (The Board) reaffirms Reform Judaism's unwavering support for reproductive health and rights, which specifically includes access to abortion. This access to abortion is founded upon Jewish values that prioritize the life, health, and well-being of the mother and the belief that life does not begin until birth. The government legislating restrictions on abortion access and forcing medical professionals to delay care goes against Jewish law and practices. This legislation includes passing laws limiting, affecting or interfering with abortion access or banning or delaying life-saving medical practices. Such restrictions contravene Jewish teachings and, more importantly, infringe on religious freedom.

The Board's adoption of this Statement is informed by thousands of years of Jewish texts and values that emphasize *pikuach nefesh*, our sacred obligation to preserve life and protect the physical health and well-being of those who are pregnant. Reform Judaism also emphasizes personal autonomy and respects pregnant individuals' ability to make informed decisions about their own life, their own body, and what will be best for their health and well-being.

The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) has stated that "Life is sacred in Judaism. Banning potentially life-saving medical procedures and interfering with a patient's decision-making and moral agency runs contrary to the Jewish commandment to protect life. Further, this belief, combined with biblical and rabbinic emphasis on human dignity, has led the Reform Movement to view the life of a pregnant individual as paramount, placing a stronger emphasis on protecting existing life than on potential life." [Exodus 21:22-23].

The URJ has also stated that "(T)he rabbis tell us that a physician's job is to heal, and that if they withhold medical care, it is as if they have shed blood. 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 Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 336:1]. Regressive state laws that prevent physicians and other providers from providing health care are in direct opposition to this sacred duty.

With these Jewish laws and teachings in mind, the URJ responded to the Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, and which left regulation of abortion rights up to the states. The URJ said "As a result of these laws and the Supreme Court's decision, patients and providers risk criminalization, hundreds of clinics have been forced to close, providers are denied the ability to provide necessary medical procedures, and patients are unable to obtain the health care services they need."

The Board recognizes that the *Dobbs* decision will cause irreparable harm to medical professionals, patients and their families. North Carolina will try to further ban or severely restrict abortions. These changes would be an unwarranted and dangerous intrusion into personal freedoms by the state legislature.

The Reform Movement's positions on reproductive rights are grounded in the core belief that each person should have agency and autonomy over their own bodies. Our advocacy around abortion access is inspired by the Jewish value of *kavod ha'briyot*, respect for individual dignity.

In conclusion, the Jewish Reform Movement has advocated for safe and legal abortion access for decades. The Board endorses this position and supports the Reform Movement's beliefs on these matters.