

St. Petersburg Monthly Meeting **Minute on Reproductive Rights**

This minute by the St Petersburg Monthly Meeting (SPMM) Ad Hoc Committee on Reproductive Rights was approved by the SPMM Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business on 5/21/23.

The members of the St. Petersburg Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends draw on our shared faith and practice in approving this minute as a testimony of our beliefs.

Origin of our Opinion

Through the testimonies and practice of our Quaker belief we respect the individuality of each person's spiritual journey, knowing that decisions can lead to both endings and beginnings, often in unexpected ways. The decision to have, or not have, children and the decision of whom to marry, or not marry, are examples of deeply personal, individual decisions to be made by the person or people involved, in the presence of Spirit.

Sanctity of Life

We acknowledge the sanctity of all life, honor and value the beauty of procreation. We recognize that an embryo's potential to thrive is wholly dependent on the support and nurturing of a biological or chosen family and of society. We seek to value this by addressing injustice, inequity, and coercion in society's present stance on reproductive health.

Privacy of Health Decisions

We affirm life by endorsing laws and policies that provide access to comprehensive reproductive medicine, including access to safe and legal abortion care, for women and families. We hold that the many-faceted impacts of both pregnancy and the termination of that pregnancy, including abortion care, is a profoundly personal health care decision which should be decided by a pregnant person in consultation with their doctor and their partner if they find it appropriate. We affirm life by respecting and protecting the inalienable right every human has to determine their individual role in human reproduction and family planning. We believe that no other rights of any government, group, or individual supersede this right.

Immorality of Forced Pregnancy

We come to this view by acknowledging the historical litany of suffering caused by forced procreation and its kindred injustice, outlawed procreation. These are dual horrors which have been wielded by persons and groups of certain classes, parties, races, sexes, and genders at various times and in various places to enforce their

sometimes legal, yet always unequal and morally illegitimate, privileged status among their fellow humans.

Education

The discussion of women's reproductive health must be divorced from biased, politically motivated, misinformation. We call for medically-accurate sex education for all ages on the safe practice and choices related to sexual behavior. Information relating to sex, contraception and termination of pregnancy (abortion) care must be easily accessible and delivered in a truthful, non-coercive environment without religious bias of any sort. It is vital to the well-being of our communities that quality and affordable medical care and comprehensive sex education should be available to everyone.

Religious Liberty

We support rights of conscience, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state. We value honest religious liberty which upholds the right of each person to make their own faith-based or conscience-based healthcare decisions. Each person should have opportunity for personal deliberation in accordance with their own moral codes, faith beliefs and consciences, and access to the level of care they believe is right for them. We reject any notion that religious, governing, or political bodies should have any say whatsoever in women's reproductive health decisions. Religious leaders and government officials have no business imposing their personal faith strictures or religious definitions of medical services into the laws of the land or the private lives of women and families. We protest the enshrinement of any faith strictures as public policy and disassociate ourselves from these restrictive voices.

Criminalization

We are opposed to recent federal and state legal actions which threaten the autonomy of pregnant peoples' bodies, and which criminalize their private, personal decisions. We should not be outlawing an individual's right to choose an abortion, which historically has led to many tragic cases of desperation and death. We reject the reasoning that would enable judges and legislatures to ban abortion and promote forced birth. We believe we should work to decriminalize any such decisions, and to preserve an individual's right and ability to carry out their decision.

Parenthood Rights

We believe that every child should be wanted, cared for and educated in a safe, healthy and loving, environment. Our society must share the responsibility of ensuring families and children realize their full potential and aid the termination a pregnancy if desired. In the case of non-consensual conception, sexual abuse, domestic violence, health concerns and even birthing situations where trauma is not present, the health and desire of the person giving birth is paramount.

Future Ramifications

As a religious organization that adheres to the testimony of equality, we believe that rights and equitable access to care must be available to all individuals and provided where their needs can best be met. An acceptance of all the variables in regard to sexuality and gender must be introduced at all levels of society so that the rights of all parents and their children may be respected. The current frenzy of exclusion which is marginalizing and demonizing non- heterosexual parents and their families must be reversed. We are opposed to any restrictions affecting same sex and transgender families.

Societal support

We seek a country with an equitable health care system that does not impose the greatest burdens on those least able to bear them. We must maintain and improve the physical and mental health of our population with affordable, equitable, and accessible healthcare that covers the entire life span, from family planning, contraception access, and prenatal care to end-of-life care.

All families must have equal opportunities to prosper. One of the most significant factors that lead to mental and physical health failure and the termination of pregnancies is poverty. Along with prioritizing public health services and affordable health care with robust federal support, we must target poverty, ensuring that policies regarding family must also include a living wage, paid family leave, affordable housing, affordable childcare, and high-quality public schools.

It is our belief that implementation of such measures will lead to a more affirming and nurturing society.