Achieving Health Equity & Justice Through the Reproductive Justice Framework

Monica Raye Simpson
Executive Director

@sistersong_woc
@monicarsimpson
monica@sistersong.net
WE ALL HAVE A STORY TO TELL…
SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective is a national membership organization founded in 1997. Our purpose is to build an effective network of individuals and organizations to improve institutional policies and systems that impact the lives of marginalized communities. SisterSong’s mission is to strengthen and amplify the collective voices of Indigenous women and women of color to achieve reproductive justice by eradicating reproductive oppression and securing human rights.
Colonization
Slavery
Puerto Rican Pill Trials
Sterilization of Black Women
Tuskegee Experiment
LGBTQ Discrimination
The concept of Reproductive Justice began to take shape when members of a women of color delegation returned from the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt. Shortly after, a group of African American women caucused at the Illinois Pro-Choice Alliance Conference in Chicago. The group became known as Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice. They decided to devise a strategy to challenge the proposed healthcare reform campaign by the Clinton Administration that did not include guaranteeing access to abortion. They integrated the concepts of reproductive rights, social justice and human rights to launch the term 'Reproductive Justice' – Loretta Ross
RJ Founding Mothers

Toni M. Bond Leonard
Terri James
Cynthia Newbille
Winnette P. Willis
Rev. Alma Crawford
Bisola Marignay
Loretta Ross
Kim Youngbloood
Evelyn S. Field
Cassandra McConnell
Elizabeth Terry
Able Mable Thomas
BLACK WOMEN ON HEALTH CARE REFORM

August 16, 1994

Dear Members of Congress:

Black women have unique health problems that must be addressed while you are debating health care reform legislation. Lack of access to treatment for diseases that primarily affect Black women and the inaccessibility of comprehensive preventive health care services are important issues that must be addressed under reform. We are particularly concerned about coverage for the full range of reproductive services under health care reform legislation.

Reproductive freedom is a life and death issue for many Black women and deserves as much recognition as any other freedom. The right to have an abortion is a personal decision that must be made by a woman in consultation with her physician. Accordingly, unimpeded access to abortion as a part of the full range of reproductive health services offered under health care reform, is essential. Moreover, abortion coverage must be provided for all women under health care reform regardless of ability to pay, with no interference from the government. WE WILL NOT ENDORSE A HEALTH CARE REFORM SYSTEM THAT DOES NOT COVER THE FULL RANGE OF REPRODUCTIVE SERVICES FOR ALL WOMEN - INCLUDING ABORTION.

In addition to reproductive health services, health care reform must include:

- **Universal coverage and equal access to health services.** Everyone must be covered under health care reform. To be truly universal, benefits must be provided regardless of income, health or employment status, age or location. It must be affordable for individuals and families, without deductibles and copayments. All people must be covered equally.

- **Comprehensiveness.** The package must cover all needed health care services, including diagnostic, treatment, preventive, long-term care, mental health services, prescription drugs and pre-existing conditions. All reproductive health services must be covered and treated the same as other health services. This includes Pap tests, mammograms, contraceptive methods, prenatal care, delivery, abortion, sterilization, infertility services, STDS AND HIV/AIDS screening and treatment. Everyone must also be permitted to choose their own health care providers.

- **Protection from discrimination.** The plan must include strong anti-discriminatory provisions to ensure the protection of all women of color, the elderly, the poor and those with disabilities. In addition, the plan must not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. In order to accomplish this goal, Black women must be represented on national, state and local planning, review, and decision-making bodies.

We, the undersigned, are dedicated to ensuring that these items are covered under health care reform legislation. As your constituents, we believe that you have a responsibility to work for the best interests of those you represent, and we request that you work for passage of a bill that provides coverage for these services.

Sincerely,
Expanding Beyond Choice

Reproductive Justice

Reproductive Health

Reproductive Rights

SisterSong
Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
Every individual has the human right to:

1. Decide if and when they will have a child and the conditions under which they will give birth

2. Decide if they will not have a child and their options for preventing or ending a pregnancy

3. Parent the children they already have with the necessary social supports in safe environments and healthy communities, and without fear of violence from individuals or the government

4. Bodily Autonomy free from all forms of reproductive oppression.

Reproductive Justice Principles
Our Vision for Reproductive Justice:

When all people have the economic, social and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, sexuality and reproduction for ourselves, our families and our communities in all areas of our lives.

From Forward Together’s Paper, A New Vision for Advancing Our Movement for Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Justice
Implementing the Reproductive Justice Framework

- Center the most marginalized
- Understand & Implement intersectionality
- Work to achieve Human Rights
- Work to dismantle structural racism
Reproductive Oppression

The control and exploitation of women, girls, and gender oppressed people through our bodies, sexuality, labor, and reproduction.
- Civil Rights – Non-Discrimination, Equality
- Political Rights – Voting, Speech, Assembly
- Economic Rights – Living Wage, Workers’ Rights
- Social Rights – Health Care, Food, Shelter, Education, Welfare
- Cultural Rights – Religion, Language
- Environmental Rights – Clean Air, Water, No Toxic Neighborhoods
- Developmental Rights – Control Own Natural Resources
- Sexual Rights – Right to Have or Not Have Children, Right to Marry & When, Same-Sex Rights, Trans-gender Rights, Right to Birth Control and Abortion, Right to Sexual Pleasure and Define Families
What is Intersectionality?

- **A term** named by Kimberle Crenshaw, a Black civil rights advocate, lawyer and scholar.
- **A framework** designed to explore the dynamic between co-existing identities (e.g. woman, Black) and connected systems of oppression (e.g. patriarchy, white supremacy)
- **Integrative** – multiple oppressions can exist at the same time
- **Expanded** to include age, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, religion, national origin
- **Challenges** single-issue organizing
How does Intersectionality work?

- Considers social inequality beyond that which is part of your individual experience
- Requires a thorough consideration of power – how it operates as a dynamic on both an individual and collective basis
- Mindful of context, conscious of how comparative privilege can shape and even limit perspective

Marissa Alexander
From Theory to Practice

- Marissa’s human right to parent her children in a healthy and safe environment was violated due to domestic violence.

- Marissa’s human right to live a self determined life and to bodily autonomy was violated due to domestic violence.

- Due to an unjust criminal justice system that lacks the ability to analyze and eliminate racial and gender bias within legislation such as the Stand Your Ground Law - which should be able to protect those in danger - Marissa Alexander, a Black mother, was imprisoned.

- Because of her imprisonment, Marissa was alienated from her children, which included her 9 week old breast fed daughter.

- Because of her imprisonment, Marissa's children were placed in the custody of the man who was charged with violent behavior.
Statue of J. Marion Sims Removed
Honoring Henrietta Lacks
Correcting Curriculum

Pearson issues apology for publishing racist theories about treating pain in nursing textbook

By Natelegé Whaley | Oct. 19, 2017

On Thursday, Pearson, an education publishing company, apologized for publishing a nursing textbook section that contained racist...
In 25 states, more than half of women live in a county without a clinic that provides abortion.
• There were 29 abortion-providing facilities in Michigan in 2014, and 20 of those were clinics. These numbers represent a 29% decline since 2011 in overall providers, and a 33% decline in clinics from 2011, when there were 41 abortion providers overall, of which 30 were clinics.

• In 2014, 90% of U.S. counties had no clinics providing abortions. Some 39% of women of reproductive age lived in those counties and would have had to travel elsewhere to obtain an abortion. Of patients obtaining abortions in 2008, one-third had to travel more than 25 miles one way to reach a facility.

• In 2014, some 89% of Michigan counties had no clinics that provided abortions, and 40% of Michigan women lived in those counties.
Abortion Restrictions in Michigan

- A woman must receive state-directed counseling that includes information designed to discourage her from having an abortion, and then wait 24 hours before the procedure is provided.

- Private insurance policies cover abortion only in cases of life endangerment, unless individuals purchase an optional rider at an additional cost.

- Health plans offered in the state’s health exchange under the Affordable Care Act can only cover abortion if the woman's life is endangered, unless individuals purchase an optional rider at an additional cost.

- Abortion is covered in insurance policies for public employees only in cases of life endangerment, unless individuals purchase an optional rider at an additional cost.

- The use of telemedicine to administer medication abortion is prohibited.

- The parent of a minor must consent before an abortion is provided.

- Public funding is available for abortion only in cases of life endangerment, rape or incest.
Wondering if you were properly counseled on LARCs?

Know the facts and your rights.

#LARCprinciples
#endshackling
NC
Things to Remember…

- “Intersectionality is the process – Human Rights is the goal” – Loretta Ross
- There is no equity without justice.
- Connect to the communities you serve.
- Make a commitment to dismantle white supremacy whenever and however it shows up.
- Expand your definition of continued education.
Resources for Continued Education
Join us to build aMovement forReproductive Justice!
SisterSong: Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective | sistersong.net
1237 Ralph David Abernathy Blvd
Atlanta, GA 30310

@SisterSongwoc

@sistersong_woc

@sistersong_woc