



PRESS RELEASE
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In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda A Joint Announcement Statement

In 1994, having participated in the International Conference on Population & Development (ICPD) in Cairo and a number of national conferences in the United States, a group of Black women gathered in Chicago in a moment that would launch a new activist's Reproductive Justice movement for women. Sharing frustration about the global reproductive health status of Black women and the limitations of a privacy-based "pro-choice" movement when women of color had minimal choices, the Black Women's Caucus of the Illinois Pro-Choice Alliance determined the necessity of adopting a human rights framework for women of color and low income women that addressed issues of bodily autonomy with reproductive decision-making. Adopting human rights, social justice and reproductive rights tenets, these women created a transformational and grassroots-based movement for social change. With the definitions and concepts of Reproductive Justice in place, the Black Women's Caucus sought affirmation and support from the cadre of women of color working domestically on reproductive health and rights.

Standing on the shoulders of this leadership and as part of this legacy, we are proud to announce our collective partnership in forming - ***In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda*** - an organizational initiative designed to amplify and lift up the voices of Black women at national and regional levels in our ongoing fight to secure Reproductive Justice for all women and girls.

As a long-term change strategy in the lives of women of color, Reproductive Justice requires sustained resources, commitment and momentum. As organizations and individuals, we have worked tirelessly for the last two decades for the reproductive rights, health and justice of Black women. Our years of work demonstrate our commitment. Our successes at the state and local levels demonstrate our momentum. But we often toil in our communities with little to no funding.

Marcela Howell, a fierce advocate on behalf of Black women and girls, approached several foundations with the goal of securing sustained funding that would build the capacity, infrastructure and media savvy of Black women-centered reproductive and health organizations as a way to strengthen our work and voices in lifting up Reproductive Justice principles in the national dialogue. Beginning with the Trust Black Women Partnership, Marcela has tirelessly

advocated with national foundations to support Black women's RJ organizations as we inform, educate and advocate with our communities and policymakers on behalf of healthcare access for Black women and their families.

Last fall, our five organizations met with Marcela to finalize this new partnership as a next step in our efforts. For us, Reproductive Justice is the human right to control our bodies, our sexuality, our gender, our work and our reproduction. That right can only be achieved when all women and girls have the complete economic, social, and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, our families, and our communities in all areas of our lives. It is this vision that propels this new initiative.

In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda will focus on abortion rights and access, contraceptive equity and comprehensive sex education as our key policy issues. As a Reproductive Justice initiative, we will approach these issues from a human rights perspective, incorporating the intersections of race, gender, class, sexual orientation and gender identity with the situational impacts of economics, politics and culture that make up the lived experiences of Black women in this country.

In 2012, we partnered with Communications Consortium Media Center (CCMC) to commission new groundbreaking public opinion research on how Black communities felt about abortion rights and other reproductive health issues. Using landline and cell phones, the research firm of Belden Russonello Strategies LLC conducted a survey of 1,006 Black adults (18 and older). The findings of the survey, *African American Attitudes on Abortion, Contraception and Teen Sexual Health*, showed overwhelming support among Black communities for abortion rights and access, contraceptive equity and comprehensive sex education.

The research also showed that bodily autonomy and empowerment are at the core of Black women's leadership on these issues and that Black communities are supportive of that leadership. Indeed, 85 percent of Black women and men agreed to the statement "*when it comes to abortion, we should trust Black women to make the important personal decisions that are best for themselves and their families.*" That statement had agreement across gender, age, education, and political ideology, including 82 percent of self-identified conservatives and 81 percent of respondents who identified themselves as being very religious.

Trusting Black women to make their own decisions about their own bodies is critical to advancing Reproductive Justice. Pre-Roe configurations that place that decision in the hands of "a woman and her doctor," or "a woman and her spouse" or "a woman and her minister" may have temporary political saliency, but they ignore the historical oppression of Black women's lives when it comes to controlling our reproductive health.

"Black Women for Wellness is pleased to stand with our sister organizations as we embark on this exciting partnership. Our joining forces, sharing knowledge and resources, and supporting efforts, help to diminish our concerns about the declining reproductive health of Black women and girls. Our hope is bolstered, our determination reinforced, our power increased by this partnership." **Janette Robinson Flint**, executive director, [Black Women for Wellness](#)

"The Black Women's Health Imperative is excited to be part of this important and vital initiative. The National Black Women's RJ Agenda reaffirms the collective strength of black women's voices and elevates our work to make Black women's sexual health and Reproductive Justice a priority and strategic focus. Today, we proudly stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our sister organizations in standing up for the basic right to make decisions about our own bodies." **Linda Goler Blount**, MPH, president and CEO, [Black Women's Health Imperative](#)

"As we celebrate 20 years of our foremothers building the movement for Reproductive Justice, New Voices Pittsburgh supports the launch of the National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda. We believe in the transformative and healing power of Reproductive Justice; in our work and in our own voice, we honor our ancestors, we represent the uniqueness of Black women across many identities and boldly advance the rights of Black women and girls now and in the future." **La'Tasha D. Mayes**, executive director, [New Voices Pittsburgh](#).

"SisterLove is excited to join this initiative as we engage in a struggle for Black women's leadership and capacity to make the best decisions for our families and our own destinies. Women's sexual and reproductive justice requires systemic social, behavioral and cultural transformation. The National Black Women's RJ Agenda is a roadmap to get us there." **Dazon Dixon Diallo**, executive director, [SisterLove, Inc.](#)

"SPARK Reproductive Justice Now is proud to be part of this exciting national Reproductive Justice initiative. As an organization that works on sexual and reproductive freedom in the south, we believe that the National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda will serve as a catalyst in lifting up our voices together in our fight for reproductive rights, health and justice within our communities." **Malika Redmond**, former executive director, [SPARK Reproductive Justice Now](#)

"This new national initiative represents a proactive step in defining and implementing our vision of Reproductive Justice. The National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda is an opportunity to lift up the voices of Black women as spokespeople on reproductive health issues - speaking our own truths to the media, to our policymakers, to our communities, and to our allies." **Marcela Howell**, strategic director, National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda

Black women's lives are rich and complex - our experiences matter. Black women's voices bring depth and insight into policies – our lives matter. Black women's history illustrates the call for reproductive rights and justice – our bodies matter. Our voices, our lives, our bodies, our decisions count!

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