

2024 STATE POLICY PRIORITIES

At In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda, our core mission is to amplify the voices of Black women leaders at the national and state levels in our ongoing fight to secure reproductive justice for all people. We develop new and expansive policy solutions to the most pressing crises we face as a society. Working across all levels of government, we work to educate and mobilize Black women, girls and gender-expansive people on a span of issues, from maternal health, abortion access, and contraceptive equity, to economic justice, voting rights, and environmental justice. We are grounded in state partnership.

The Black-women-led state organizations we lead our work with include:

- Birth in Color RVA
- Black Women for Wellness
- Black Women's Health Imperative
- New Voices for Reproductive Justice
- Oshun Family Center
- SisterLove, Inc
- SisterReach
- SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW!
- The Afiya Center
- The New Jersey Black Women Physicians Association
- The Wisdom Institute
- Women With a Vision

Our work is rooted in a **Reproductive Justice framework**. We believe in the human right to control our bodies, our sexuality, our gender, our work, and our reproduction. And we know that Reproductive Justice can only be achieved when all people have the complete economic, social, and political power and mental, physical, and community health to make decisions about their bodies and their futures.

Our work is also informed by the **intersectional impact of systemic racism, sexism, and classism**. Reproductive Justice requires bodily autonomy and racial justice to be fully realized. We stand in unity with people around the country who are calling for an end to state-sanctioned violence against Black people and we support programs and policies that ensure LGBTQIA+ individuals have the resources and the right to make healthy decisions about their lives.

We also know that religion has long been an important aspect in the lives of Black people

and Black communities in the U.S. We support the Black exercise of **moral agency to achieve liberation** at the intersections of race, class, gender, and other forms of oppression.

Our Policy Priorities

Black women, girls, and gender-expansive people are dynamic leaders across communities and sectors. At the same time, they face increasing state-based attacks on their human rights: abortion bans in dozens of states and the loss of *Roe's* protections; attempts to circumvent LGBTQIA+ liberation; disproportionately high Black maternal morbidity and mortality; environmental injustice fueled by a climate crisis; inaccessible or inadequate health care; pay inequality and workplace discrimination; unaffordable housing; voter restrictions; and countless others. **Our Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda is a guide for state policymakers who want to improve outcomes for**

Black women, girls and gender-expansive people. It offers concrete policy solutions that will directly change your local communities for the better. Our key issues include:

HEALTH EQUITY, CARE, ACCESS

Systemic racism, toxic stress, and a long history of medical mistreatment and socioeconomic inequities are killing Black women, femmes, girls, and gender-expansive people. We battle chronic health conditions at higher rates than any other population – including breast and reproductive cancers, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. We urge state leaders to join us, and:

- Invest federal and state funding in the identification and amelioration of diseases and conditions that inequitably impact Black women, including those caused by social determinants of health.

- Recruit a diverse, representative, and responsive health care workforce that hears Black women, especially in state-run health care facilities, and require training on timely and appropriate treatment for all races and ethnicities.
- Expand access to mental health services through new flexibilities granted by federal law.

MATERNAL HEALTH AND PREGNANCY CARE

Black women in the U.S. are 3 to 5 times more likely to experience a pregnancy-related death than their white counterparts regardless of income or educational level. Our most recent national poll, commissioned ahead of the 2024 election cycle, reveals that nearly one-quarter of Black women 18 to 44 surveyed felt worried about their health and safety during pregnancy or childbirth because of their race. This is not only a public health crisis but a moral one as well. We support Black women's access to high-quality, affordable health care before, during, and after pregnancy. We urge federal leaders to:

- Reimburse care provided by doulas and midwives, appoint doulas and midwives to Maternal Mortality Review Committees, and allow birth centers to operate under midwifery supervision.
- Implement Medicaid coverage for holistic maternity care for at least one year postpartum.
- Require comprehensive coverage for fertility care and treatment.

ABORTION ACCESS

Access to abortion care cannot be separated from other human and reproductive rights. Black women, girls, and gender-expansive people are more likely to live in states that have enacted near-total bans on surgical and medication abortion—and Black pregnant people living in poverty and battling systemic racism are not able to simply travel to another state to receive abortion care. We trust Black women to make the important personal decisions that are best for themselves and their families. We support access to abortion care, including having insurance coverage, so every woman can access affordable and safe abortion care. We urge state leaders to:

- Eliminate all restrictions on abortion care, including waiting periods, surgical setting requirements, and parental consent or notification.

- Provide public funding for all abortion care services and invest in community-based providers.
- Protect all access to medication abortion.

CONTRACEPTIVE EQUITY

Historically, Black people have been the targets of coercive contraceptive practices and policies, misinformation about the use of contraceptives, and unethical contraceptive testing. Black women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals continue to face provider bias about recommended family planning services, coercion about contraceptive choices and services, and inability to access the full range of contraceptives. Further, many states that have restricted access to abortion care have also made it harder for their residents to access contraception. As new, over-the-counter options for contraception enter the market, federal legislators need to prioritize removing cost sharing for as many contraceptive options as possible. We urge state leaders to:

- Support the purchase of birth control pills over-the-counter.
- Prevent “religious freedom” from blocking access to contraception and comprehensive sexual health education, discussed below.

COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL EDUCATION

Sexual health education and resources that are comprehensive, medically accurate, and culturally sensitive, and inclusive of all gender-identities can not only reduce racial disparities in reproductive and sexual health, but also enable Black people to get the tools and information needed to make the best decisions about their own bodies and their own relationships. Comprehensive sexual health education is a catalyst to the information and empowerment needed to navigate if, when, and how to engage in safe and consensual sexual activity—and how to find pleasure in safe and consensual sexual activity. Our systems lack comprehensive sexual health education that include information and strategies for addressing social pressure, discussing stigma, and fostering self-esteem. We urge state leaders to:

- Leverage federal ESSER funding to implement comprehensive sexual health education.
- Require comprehensive and medically-accurate sexual education in all public schools.

VOTING RIGHTS

Black women are the largest voting constituency in the American electorate. Every year, we register voters, organize our communities, and deliver the votes that give politicians their jobs. At In Our Own Voice, we are committed to increasing Black women's voter turnout in local and state elections, and have worked to strengthen voter participation through our **I AM A REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE VOTER** initiative. We urge state leaders to join us, and:

- Protect the rights of all citizens to access the ballot box, including by removing undue barriers to voting and ensuring every eligible vote is counted.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Persistent wage disparities hold Black families back from financial security and the ability to generate wealth. Black women are paid only 66 cents for every dollar a white man is paid, as compared to the 74 cents white women make. Black women are also disproportionately segregated into sectors that are the least likely to have access to paid leave and workplace protections. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated existing inequities. We urge state leaders to:

- Increase the minimum wage to \$15 and link future increases to the consumer price index.
- Leverage federal funding to provide free state-run child care for working families and students.
- Implement a state-based paid leave program.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Black women, girls, and gender-expansive people deserve to be free from community-based dangers, including gender-based and police violence, and to live in safe and healthy communities. We urge state leaders to:

- Prioritize environmental justice, including increasing access to clean water, in implementing *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)* funding and any future investments.
- Invest public safety funding into restorative justice approaches, including emergency response services that involve community-based social workers and mental health professionals.
- Leverage the federal Sexual Assault Services Grant Program to conduct research with data disaggregated by race.