

Voices for Vermont's Children



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Submitted by: Amy Rose, Policy Associate
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Testimony, Prop 5 - Reproductive Liberty

Voices for Vermont's Children strongly supports the Reproductive Liberty amendment (Prop 5). Across the country, the right to reproductive autonomy has been compromised, and is threatened further, in ways that many of us did not anticipate only a few years ago. Not only does this amendment, because of its inclusive reach, represent an opportunity for Vermont to answer these threats with proactive and comprehensive protection for fundamental human rights, it also establishes a firm foundation on which to pursue our broader goals of building a just and equitable world for our children.

We have been struck by the degree to which this amendment anchors the principles of the Reproductive Justice movement, which holds several interconnected values: “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.”¹ This movement, for decades, has been asking us to reach a deeper understanding of the ways various oppressions impact the circumstances, choices, and realities of family creation and parenthood. Asking us to look beyond choice alone, it demands that we add multiple layers of context to our understanding of every situation. Reproductive Justice asserts that “all oppressions impact our reproductive lives,” sometimes in nuanced ways, and sometimes more overtly. A necessary starting point to correct this, then, is preventing the opportunity for direct oppression, coercion, and control of our reproductive lives by any individual or entity.

As a practical matter, this policy does not impact our systems or the long-term trends already underway for decades. The rate of births, as well as the rate of abortions, have been steadily declining in Vermont as well as nationally for forty years.² These trends are shaped by societal, economic, and now, environmental forces, as well as the availability of comprehensive health care and information. In contrast, allowing the erosion of reproductive liberty to encroach further into our systems is detrimental both to the systems and the people they serve. In countries

¹ <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice>

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https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/HS-VR-2019VSB_final.pdf#page=138&zooom=auto.-177.19

where abortion is illegal, it happens at a higher rate than in countries where it is legal.³ The safe provision of health care is a benefit which a society of our resources is obligated to provide.

The Reproductive Liberty amendment is solid ground from which to prevent further oppressions as we look to preserve the future we intend to build for our children. Then, let's turn our attention and resources to ensuring that the children and young people in our state, and their families, have what they need: a society free of systemic and individual oppression, affordable housing and health care, livable wage jobs with benefits that support caregivers, and a robust safety net for unexpected hardships. These are the real forces behind people's choices about family creation.

³ <https://www.gutmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-worldwide>