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A Reproductive Rights Agenda for the 1990's†

Kathryn Kolbert††

With the Supreme Court currently reconsidering *Roe v. Wade*, and the renewed activism that has resulted, it is an opportune time for the pro-choice movement to articulate our vision of the future and to grapple with the many hard questions that surround sexuality, childbearing, and parenting. True reproductive freedom, which must be our ultimate goal, includes much more than the legal right to choose abortion. It includes the right to decide whether, when, with whom, and under what conditions women will have children, and envisions a world in which women will have both the economic means and the social conditions to effectuate whatever moral choices they make. Only with the freedom to control their fertility, are women free to participate fully and equally in our society: to learn and to grow, to better themselves, to establish a home and family, to follow their dreams or to express themselves and contribute as mothers, workers, artists, scientists, or in whatever roles they may choose.

Unless parents are able to ensure that adequate food, clothing, shelter, and quality child care and education are available for their children, their reproductive choices are limited. If women and men are coerced or exclusively socialized into heterosexual relationships or made to believe that childbearing is permissible only within two-parent heterosexual relationships, their reproductive choices are constrained. When women fear having children because they wish not to raise them in an atmosphere of sexual assault, abuse, violence, or harassment, their reproductive choices are restricted. Unless women and men have access to sex education and counseling, and affordable, comprehensive health care for themselves and their children, they cannot make truly voluntary decisions about their sexuality, childbearing, or parenting. Until women, especially young women, are able to choose to become mothers because it is appropriate for their lives, rather than because they have no realistic possibilities for advancement in our society, all of our reproductive choices will be circumscribed.

When we think of how many women and families are now denied the

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ability to make free reproductive choices because their income is too low, or the color of their skin is too dark; or because they live in rural communities, have physical disabilities, or have relationships with others of the same sex; or because they are uninformed, fearful, or stigmatized, we realize that the policy agenda for a pro-choice society is a very long one. With these thoughts in mind, the following reproductive rights agenda is offered as a starting point for discussion with the hope that it may help our movement to develop consensus on basic issues.

During the next decade, our movement must work to ensure:

1. Legal and social institutions that enable all persons to make voluntary and informed decisions about their own sexuality, childbearing and parenting, and respect women's varied moral choices.
2. Affordable and physically accessible, comprehensive health care and human services that focus on wellness and the prevention of problems as well as on the cure or amelioration of problems and that is provided in a culturally appropriate environment.
3. Within this comprehensive system, access to a full range of safe, quality, affordable, confidential, non-coercive, and convenient reproductive health care and counseling, including birth control and abortion services, options counseling, genetic screening, prenatal care, childbirth and postpartum care, pediatric care, and treatment for infertility, sexually transmitted diseases, and drug and alcohol abuse.
4. Access to full and accurate information about the ramifications of accepting or rejecting a particular health option, including explanations of medical procedures and their risks and benefits in the woman's own language and understandable terms, and the right to refuse information.
5. Freedom from unnecessary or invasive practices that endanger women's lives or health, or that use medical power or authority to coerce reproductive decisions.
6. Understandable and age appropriate education and information about sexuality, reproductive health, contraceptives, childbearing, parenting, infertility, and sexually transmitted diseases including the risks and pathology of AIDS and the necessity of "safe sex" practices.
7. Freedom to say no to sexuality, childbearing, and parenting, as well as to choose these options, and freedom to express one's sexuality and to adopt alternative forms of family and living arrangements both inside and outside the traditional framework of marriage and heterosexuality.
8. For all families, the economic means to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, childcare, and education for their children including an equitable welfare and education system and jobs that pay a living wage.

9. Reductions of economic barriers to alternative forms of reproduction such as adoption, donor insemination, *in vitro* fertilization, or embryo transfer.
10. Public policies that ease the burdens of working families including affordable child care services, gender-neutral pregnancy and family and medical leave provisions with pay, and flexible work schedules available without penalty to fathers and mothers and workplace educational programs that encourage male and partner participation in prenatal and childcare tasks.
11. Elimination of reproductive hazards within the environment and work place.
12. Freedom to have sex, and to bear and rear children without fear of sexual assault, abuse, violence or harassment.
13. Fair and equitable divorce, child support, child custody and dependency laws when marriage or other family arrangements dissolve or prove inadequate.
14. Greater participation of women in this country's decision-making councils.

