Statement Concerning the Overturning of Roe v. Wade

Earlier this year, after the draft of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn the 1973 decision in the Roe v. Wade case was leaked to the public, the National Women's Studies Association felt compelled to speak out against this decision. We were alarmed. We were concerned. We were furious, but we were not surprised. Today's decision represents the culmination of work that has been done over several decades to reverse Roe v. Wade and give States the ultimate authority to govern, police, and oversee our most personal decisions about our bodies.

In 1973, SCOTUS concluded that the constitutional rights to privacy and liberty protected a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy. Justice Harry Blackmun, who wrote the opinion for the majority, noted that while "the Constitution does not explicitly mention any right to privacy," several prior decisions had found "a guarantee of certain areas or zones of privacy." He went on to note that this guarantee of privacy is grounded in several amendments within the Bill of Rights and in the 14th Amendment's guarantee of liberty, which, taken together, "create zones of privacy in areas of society such as marriage, contraception, family relationships, and child-rearing."

Today's decision in the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization case not only reverses the last 50 years of precedent but will disproportionately impact economically challenged communities of color and marginalized groups who are already navigating the existing health care obstacles. It will also affect all people's ability to have reproductive choices.

To be clear, the National Women's Studies Association, the world's largest network of feminist scholars, educators, and activists, unequivocally affirms that a person's right to govern their body is a fundamental human right that must be enshrined into the law, now more than ever.

With today's SCOTUS decision, our ability to make reproductive choices will be denied or limited in scope. So far, 22 states have abortion bans on their books (ranging from early-term to near-total). Additionally, Texas, Oklahoma, and Idaho recently enacted "heartbeat" legislation allowing private individuals to sue anyone who performs or aids in an abortion after fetal cardiac activity is first detected (around six weeks of pregnancy).

We know that you are probably feeling a range of emotions today—from rage to anger to confusion to exhaustion to frustration (and everything in between!)—so we urge you to practice self-care. We need you to be healthy and prepared for what is coming next.
As we noted in our statement in May, we are at a moment where we must fight. We must push back, and we must speak out. Elections have consequences, and protests and petitions hold weight. There is power and protection when we come together.

This is the moment where we must seek out activist organizations to participate in protests, teach-ins, town halls, and vigils. This is the moment to reach out to your Congressperson, participate in voter registration drives, and use your social media platform to alert everyone to what is happening so that we can show up at the polls in November and elect people into office who will have our best interests at the top of their to-do list.

NWSA, this is the moment to stand taller, to speak louder, to look farther down the road than those who pretend to know the way, and to remember that they will try and tell us that we cannot withstand the storm only because they fail to realize that We. Are. The. Storm.

We stand ready to fight with you and to fight for you.

In love and solidarity,
Karsonya Wise Whitehead, President
National Women’s Studies Association

June 2022