

# Action Toolkit

## Advancing Reproductive Rights, Health, and Justice with Local Resolutions



A collaboration of:

- ▶ National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW);
- ▶ In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda;
- ▶ National Institute for Reproductive Health; and
- ▶ All\* Above All



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## Partner Organizations

**In Our Own Voice: National Black Women’s Reproductive Justice Agenda** is a national Reproductive Justice organization focused on lifting up the voices of Black women at the national and regional levels in our ongoing policy fight to secure Reproductive Justice for all women and girls.

**The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)** is a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms.

**All\* Above All** unites organizations and individuals to build support for lifting the bans that deny abortion coverage. Our vision is to restore public insurance coverage so that every woman, however much she makes, can get affordable, safe abortion care when she needs it.

**The National Institute for Reproductive Health (NIRH)** works across the country to increase access to reproductive health care by changing public policy, galvanizing public support, and normalizing women’s decisions to have abortions and use contraception.

## Advancing Reproductive Health, Rights & Justice with Local Resolutions

Striving for reproductive health, rights & justice means building a world where **every person has power, access and protected rights to make their own informed decisions about their body, sexuality, and future**, regardless of race, income, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, immigration status, age, ability, or any other factor.

**Local resolutions are a great way to build power for reproductive health, rights & justice.**



### What is a local resolution?

A resolution is a nonbinding motion adopted by a governing body to express support or opposition to an idea or policy. It does not carry the authority of a law. Local resolutions are passed by local, elected governing bodies, like your city council, county commission, or board of health.

### Why a local resolution to advance reproductive health, rights and justice?

Local resolutions build our power in the fight for reproductive health, rights and justice.

- ▶ **Grow the movement.** Local resolutions bring new (or previously unengaged) supporters into the work.
- ▶ **Build momentum.** Local resolutions across the country set the groundwork for national campaigns and policies.
- ▶ **Keep lawmakers accountable.** State and federal lawmakers take notice of opinions expressed in their state or districts, including the passage of local policies.
- ▶ **Raise awareness.** Local resolutions can get a fair amount of press attention, raising the profile of our issues.

### What should a local resolution in support of reproductive health, rights and justice include?

Every local resolution will be different, and should reflect the strategic vision of a diverse local coalition. A resolution can outline a statement of values, express a position on a particular policy, or put forward a combination of both. See “Get Inspired: Ideas for Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice Resolutions” in this toolkit for a menu of possible options.

The basic components of a local resolution should include the following:

#### 1. A Preamble

The preamble states the reasons for which the decision-making body is addressing the topic, and if applicable, highlights past action on the issue.

#### 2. A Target

The target is the decision-maker you want to take action. There may be multiple targets.

#### 3. An Ask

The ask is the action you want your target to take. There may be multiple asks.

## Getting a Local Resolution Passed: A Step by Step Guide

*Through your efforts to pass a local resolution, take advantage of the opportunity to organize your community and build power in the reproductive rights, health, and justice movements. Make sure you are constantly engaging new activists and strengthening partnerships as you go!*

- 1. Honor the leadership and guidance of the community most impacted.** This includes your typical allies as well as unlikely suspects. Reproductive injustice disproportionately impacts low-income people, people of color, young people, immigrants, and LGBTQ people. Reach out to organizations that serve and represent these groups, and determine together if a local resolution makes sense for your community.
- 2. Build a coalition.** Invite those organizations interested in moving forward with a resolution to join your effort. Determine the capacity to contribute and participate. This is a good opportunity to consider how you may be able to build accountable partnerships with organizations in different movements.
- 3. Determine what kind of resolution you want to pass.** Do you want your resolution to originate in the city council, county commission, or another local body? Who is your target(s) and what is your ask(s)?
- 4. Assign roles.** Determine roles of each coalition member, including: organizing your community, communicating with lawmakers, working with the media, and creating public education materials.
- 5. Find a champion.** Identify an elected official to sponsor the resolution. Identify champions by reviewing officials' voting records, reflecting on existing relationships with lawmakers, and consulting with your coalition partners. At times local officials are enthusiastic about passing a resolution but want to do so quietly; it's important to ensure that your champion is comfortable with an out-loud campaign. Without community engagement and public education, the resolution loses much of its influence.
  - ▶ Check out [NCJW's Tips on a Successful Legislative Visit](#) (also available on page 12 of this toolkit) to make the most of your meetings with lawmakers. Make sure to bring the text of your proposed resolution.
- 6. Figure out a timeline.** Research when, and how often, the local decision-making body meets, their typical process for introduction and passage of a resolution, and how long it takes for a resolution to be passed. You may be hoping to link the resolution's passage to a specific date, such as the anniversary of the US Supreme Court ruling, *Roe v. Wade*, or the passage of the Hyde Amendment. If so, work backwards from your goal. Otherwise, it may depend on the local body's capacity and how full their schedule already is. Your champions can help you determine an appropriate timeline. Make sure you take into account disruptive periods of time, such as in advance of an election or during budget hearings.
- 7. Educate and mobilize the public, and new partners.** You will need public support for the resolution to pass. Use house meetings, earned media (such as op-eds and letters to the Editor), social media, and public forums to build your base. Even if many of your coalition members have limited capacity, at a minimum they should contribute to the effort's success by reaching out to their constituents to inform them of this effort, why it's important, and how they can get involved.

**8. Track potential opposition.** Keep an eye on social media and listservs of anti-choice groups, and maintain communication with your champion. If you think you will face opposition, develop a plan to counter it. Prepare elected officials and other key stakeholders with talking points and make sure they have what they need to feel confident in their vote. Reach out to media to make sure that if they are going to cover this story, they know who to contact and how to accurately present your effort.

**9. Make sure elected officials are hearing from constituents.** In as many districts as possible, mobilize your supporters to contact their elected officials to voice support for the resolution. If possible, organize in-person visits.

**10. Testify at every hearing.** Your resolution may be heard in several committees before it reaches the full decision-making body. Discuss your hearing strategy with your champion to determine how many supporters should speak at each hearing, understanding that there may be hearings where testimony is not necessary. Have as many supporters testify as possible, but ensure each statement covers a different aspect of the resolution to avoid becoming repetitive (unless you determine that repetition is strategic).

- ▶ **Check out some tips for a successful hearing** available on page 19 of this toolkit to make your hearing as successful as possible!

**11. Make your broad support visible during the vote.** Pack the room and ensure your supporters show up with signs, clothing, and buttons demonstrating their enthusiasm. Ask supportive elected officials to wear buttons or t-shirts that demonstrate that they stand with you. Coordinate more testimonies if possible.

**12. Keep the rest of the community engaged through social media.** It may not be possible for every supporter, in your local community and beyond, to be in the room due to space constraints or other logistics. If possible, live-tweet the proceedings using a consistent hashtag and make sure the link to the livestream of the hearing if one is available. If there is no livestream, find out if you can use Facebook Live, Periscope, or another app to keep those not in attendance up to date.

**13. The resolution passes. Celebrate!**

**14. Follow up.** Make sure to coordinate a press statement and/or a press conference. Ideally, your champion(s) and a diverse group of coalition members should be invited to speak or to give a quote to press. Your organization and/or coalition should be sure to publicly and privately thank your champion, partners, and supporters. Be sure to inform your supporters of the resolution's outcome, and how they can thank your champion(s).

- ▶ **Go further.** Follow up with your state legislators and members of Congress to share your success, and express your local community's support for reproductive health, rights, and justice.

## Get Inspired: Ideas for Local Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice Resolutions

### Reproductive Justice Statement of Values

The reproductive justice framework is rooted in principles of universal human rights. Drawing from the [SisterSong: Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective definition](#), these rights include: the right to bodily autonomy; the right to have or not have children; the right to birth and/or parent children with dignity; and the right to live and/or raise a family in a safe and healthy environment. Learn more about the reproductive justice framework on the [In Our Own Voice website](#). Then, consider a resolution expressing support for these rights as part of the framework.

### Advancing Coverage for Abortion

For over 40 years, the Hyde Amendment has denied coverage for abortion to low-income women enrolled in Medicaid. Hyde-like bans also deny abortion coverage to individuals enrolled in most other federal health plans and programs, and many states restrict private insurance coverage of abortion. These bans fall hardest on women already struggling to make ends meet, who are disproportionately women of color, young women, and immigrants. Consider a resolution expressing support for abortion coverage — visit the National Institute for Reproductive Health’s [“Reinstating Coverage for Abortion” website](#) to learn about other communities that have taken this action.

### Economic Justice

We need living wages, schedules that work, paid family and medical leave, and other critical economic policies in order to achieve reproductive justice. Consider a resolution acknowledging the intersection of reproductive health and economic justice, or adding a reproductive justice lens to a local economic justice campaign, like the Fight for \$15.

### Racial Justice

We must root out racism and white supremacy from every level of our society, from our health

care system to our criminal justice system, to achieve social justice. Consider a resolution on the intersection of racial justice and reproductive rights, or adding a reproductive justice lens to a racial justice campaign.

### Justice for Youth & Young Parents

Young people face threats to moral and bodily autonomy, and barriers to health care. Consider a resolution on the intersection of reproductive rights and justice for youth and young parents, or adding a reproductive justice lens to a youth-led campaign.

### Immigrant Justice

No one should be denied bodily autonomy or access to health care because of their immigration status. Consider a resolution acknowledging the intersection between reproductive rights and immigrant rights, or adding a reproductive justice lens to an immigrant justice campaign, such as the establishment of Sanctuary Cities.

### Religious Liberty

When politicians seek to impose one religious viewpoint on all by shutting down abortion clinics or denying health care to LGBTQ individuals, it is a violation of religious liberty. People of faith who support full equality for LGBTQ people or access to abortion, for example, have a unique voice in this conversation. Consider working with interfaith partners to advance a resolution acknowledging the intersection of reproductive rights and religious liberty, or adding a reproductive justice lens to a local religious liberty campaign.

### LGBTQ Justice

LGBTQ people face discrimination at every level of society and harmful barriers to health care. Consider a resolution acknowledging the intersection of LGBTQ justice and reproductive rights, or adding a reproductive justice lens to an LGBTQ campaign.

## Sample Action Alert

**An action alert is a way to let your community take a particular action to support the local resolution, and help move the issue forward in some way.** The goal here is to influence the outcome of a vote, urge lawmakers to advance your specific policy or issue, or thank them for taking a particular course of action. Action alerts should not be too long, and the action steps you are asking your community and the lawmaker to take should be very clear. Make it as easy as possible for your supporters to take action.

### SAMPLE ACTION ALERT:

**Tip:** Include a link and explanation of the resolution, and any notes about the target, the action you want the target to take, and details about timing, such as the deadline to send e-mails.

**Subject:** Contact **[INSERT TARGET(S)] TODAY** to Support Abortion Access

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

**[This morning]**, Councilmember **[insert name]** introduced **[insert resolution name, number, and hyperlink]** calling on Congress and the state of **[insert state, if applicable]** to lift harmful bans on abortion!

Specifically, it urges federal lawmakers to end restrictions on health insurance coverage for abortion, such as the [Hyde Amendment](#), and to pass the federal [EACH Woman Act](#). Lack of health coverage should not stand in the way of a woman making decisions about pregnancy she feels is best for her circumstances.

**Please contact [insert targets] TODAY [add link] to urge them to vote for the resolution.**

Show your elected officials that you believe **[insert city]** should join [cities across the country](#) in speaking out against restrictions on abortion coverage. **Act now [add link]** to pushing back against anti-choice politicians' agenda to punish and shame women.

### SAMPLE E-MAIL TO LAWMAKER:

**Tip:** Encourage your community to customize e-mails to lawmakers with their personal stories and motivations.

**Subject:** Vote YES on [Insert resolution name and/or number]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

**[This morning]**, **[City/Locality]** Councilmember **[insert name]** introduced **[insert resolution name, number, and description]**. Lack of health coverage should not stand in the way of a woman making a personal decision about pregnancy, according to her own beliefs and circumstances. I am writing to urge you to vote YES on **[insert resolution name and number]**.

**[Use this space to bolster your argument to lawmakers. For example, insert some information on what the resolution would do and 1-3 brief reasons or data points that show why the resolution is important.]**

I hope you will stand up for reproductive health care by voting YES on **[insert resolution name and number.]**

## Local Resolution Social Media Guidance

Social media is a great way to thank your champions, push back against opposition, and build public awareness around your campaign. The below social media guide provides a general template to be tailored to your specific resolution. Customize the tweets and Facebook posts below to raise the profile of your resolution for reproductive rights, health, and justice!

### FACEBOOK

Facebook is an excellent way to grow a large base of fans and supporters, and keep your existing advocates informed. Make sure to follow and tag NCJW, In Our Own Voice, the National Institute for Reproductive Health, and All\* Above All on Facebook, and other local coalition partners engaged in your campaign. **Tip:** Facebook posts should be short and snappy, and when possible include pictures.

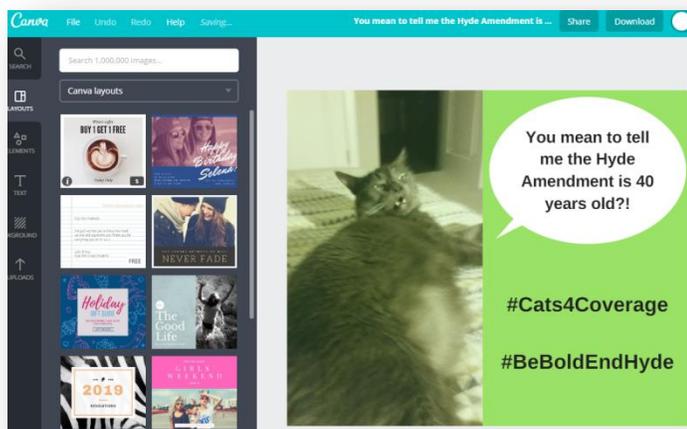
#### SAMPLE FACEBOOK POST

Everyone has the right to [campaign issue.] This is so important because [why it's important.] As a [identity, ex. teacher] I'm proud to support [official's] effort to pass a [type of local resolution] calling on [target] to [action]. #hashtag

### GRAPHICS

A picture is worth a thousand words! Sharing graphics on social media often increases engagement, and thus, the likelihood that your message will reach a wider audience. **Tip:** Post graphics to Facebook or Twitter to give viewers more information on how to become involved!

- ▶ To create a graphic, try using Canva ([www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com)) — a free online service that makes it easy.
- ▶ If you would like assistance with graphics, contact NCJW Grassroots Associate Leanne Gale at [leanne@ncjwdc.org](mailto:leanne@ncjwdc.org) or In Our Own Voice Deputy Director Michelle Batchelor at [michelle@blackrj.org](mailto:michelle@blackrj.org).



### TWITTER

Twitter is a great way to spread your point of view to the widest possible audience. Make sure to follow @NCJW, @BlackWomensRJ, @NIRHhealth, and @AllAboveAll, and other local coalition partners engaged in your campaign. **Tip:** Make sure your Tweets are 140 characters or less, and use an image to catch the viewer's eye!

#### #HASHTAGS

The # sign (or hashtag) allows you to track discussion topics based on keywords. For example, if you wanted to post about honeybees, you would include #honeybees in your tweet to join the conversation. People can then click a hashtag to see all the posts that mention that subject.

- ▶ You may want to create a new hashtag for your local campaign. For example, the DC Paid Family and Medical Leave campaign used the unique hashtag #LeadOnLeaveDC to organize information & communicate with followers on Twitter.
- ▶ In addition to creating your own, you may also want to plug into existing hashtags. Here are some hashtags that are already being used nationally that may connect to your work.
  - #BeBoldEndHyde
  - #BlackLivesMatter
  - #TrustBlackWomen
  - #PaidLeave
  - #FightFor15
  - #RefugeesWelcome
  - #ShoutYourAbortion
  - #HereToStay

### **@HANDLES:**

The @ sign (or handle) is used to call out usernames on Twitter. People will use your @handle to mention you in Tweets, send you a message, or link to your profile. If you mention someone's @handle in one of your Tweets (like a lawmaker, for example) they will receive a notification. **Tip:** *If you are beginning your Tweet with someone's @handle, make sure to include a period (.) before the @handle. Otherwise, only the person you are tagging will see it.*

### **SAMPLE TWEETS TO BUILD MOMENTUM**

- ▶ [campaign issue] is critical to our community because [why it's important!] #hashtag
- ▶ I support [campaign issue] because [why it's important!] #hashtag
- ▶ As [identity, e.g. teacher], I fight for [campaign issue] because [why it's important!] #hashtag

### **SAMPLE TWEETS TO THANK & PUSH LAWMAKERS**

- ▶ Thank you [@official] for supporting resolution to [campaign issue.] #hashtag
- ▶ We are with [@official] for fighting to [campaign issue]! #hashtag
- ▶ [.@official] as a constituent, I urge you to support resolution to [campaign issue.] #hashtag
- ▶ [.@official] please fight for [campaign issue]! #hashtag

### **SAMPLE TWEETS TO "RE-ACKNOWLEDGE" PAST SPONSORS:**

- ▶ Thanks again [@past sponsor] for supporting local resolution to [campaign issue]. #hashtag
- ▶ [.@past sponsor] is a leader who recognizes the importance of [campaign issue]. #hashtag
- ▶ Resolution in [#city] reminds us of the great leadership of [@ past sponsor] to ensure [campaign issue]. #hashtag

### **SAMPLE TWEETS TO THANK COALITION PARTNERS**

- ▶ Thank you [@partner] for your incredible leadership on [campaign issue!] #hashtag
- ▶ So proud to work with [@partner] on [campaign issue!] #hashtag
- ▶ We are united with [@coalition partner/@coalition partner/@coalition partner] in working to [campaign issue] so that [why it's important.] #hashtag

### **SAMPLE TWEETS TO CELEBRATE WINS**

- ▶ Congratulations to [#city], the latest locality to stand up for [campaign issue.] #hashtag
- ▶ Congrats [@official] on joining [@sponsor] in our effort to [[campaign issue.] #hashtag

- ▶ We are proud that [[@official/@city body](#)] supports [[campaign issue.](#)] [#hashtag](#)

## INSTAGRAM

Instagram is a great way to increase your visibility by easily sharing photos and graphics on a smartphone. Here are a few suggestions for using Instagram to maximize your campaign for a local resolution. Many of these are also applicable to Twitter!

- ▶ Report live from a meeting, hearing, or rally with photos and captions on Instagram.
- ▶ Is there a breaking news headline you would like to capture or a tweet you would like to broadcast more widely? Use your smartphone to share screenshots on Instagram.
- ▶ Add hashtags to captions to maximize your visibility.
- ▶ Use your Instagram account to like the photos of others, particularly your lawmakers, coalition partners, and grassroots advocates. This will grow your following.
- ▶ Share at least one image daily. To gain followers on Instagram, you must be active!
- ▶ Make sure to include a live link to your website in your bio to direct folks to a place where they can receive more information and get connected to your campaign.

## MESSAGING

For specific messaging assistance, please reach out to NCJW or In Our Own Voice!

- ▶ For guidance on messaging connected to Jewish values and religious liberty, contact Leanne Gale at [leanne@ncjwdc.org](mailto:leanne@ncjwdc.org).
- ▶ For guidance on messaging connected to Black women's reproductive justice, contact Michelle Batchelor at [michelle@blackrj.org](mailto:michelle@blackrj.org).
- ▶ Not sure what kind of messaging you need? Contact Leanne or Michelle and they will point you in the right direction.

## Guidelines for Having a Successful Legislative Visit

### ASSIGN ROLES

*These roles are flexible based on the number of people in your group, the length of the visit, number of issues you discuss, and who has stories.*

**LEADER(S):** Confirms meeting time and location. Introduces the group or, in a small group, allows everyone to do so. Briefly introduces group mission and work. Ensures visit is on track and that all spokespeople have a chance to speak. Collects business cards from legislative staffer at beginning and leaves the legislative visit folder or materials at the end.

### ISSUE PRESENTER & STORYTELLER:

Can be divided into two or more roles. Delivers the message, makes it personal (by telling a story/ personal experience), and speaks to why the legislator should act. Makes “the ask” and is prepared to respond depending on the legislator’s position.

**RECORDER:** Takes notes of questions, commitments, and post-meeting follow-ups. Shares with coalition partners.

**SUPPORTING ADVOCATES:** Sign the office guest book; take pictures of group during visit; after the visit, share your experience on social media (*find legislator’s twitter handle/ Facebook page*); and write a thank-you note.

### SUGGESTED MEETING FORMAT

#### OPENER:

- ▶ Express thanks for taking the time to meet.
- ▶ Introduce the group (individually, if small). Provide BRIEF context on group: who you are, how many you represent.

- ▶ Explain purpose of the meeting: to advocate for certain issue or legislation.
- ▶ Thank legislator for something (vote, cosponsorship) if possible.

### ISSUE PRESENTATIONS & STORY

- ▶ State the problem that must be addressed by policy change.
- ▶ State the policy solution and why you support this position.
- ▶ Personal story: Share your experiences or perspective.
- ▶ State “The Ask.” What do you want your legislator to do?
- ▶ Wait for response — be sure to listen!
- ▶ Offer to be a resource or to send additional information.

### WRAP UP:

- ▶ Review comments, commitments, and follow-up requests for each issue.
- ▶ Thank legislator/staff for their time; collect business cards from staff.
- ▶ Leave your business card or contact information and legislative visit folder or materials that include talking points.

### DEBRIEF:

- ▶ Meet outside of the building to discuss the visit; help Recorder write down accurate notes.
- ▶ Discuss any requests for additional information made by the office; delegate follow-up tasks to the group.
- ▶ Assign someone to write thank you notes to everyone you met with and to the legislator, briefly restating your issue messages and asks; if you met with legislative aides, be sure to mention them in letter to legislator.

## DO

**DO** be on time and prepared. Arrive early to allow time to get through security and find the room.

**DO** be prepared to meet with either your elected official or a staff member. Staff-level meetings can be quite meaningful, as staffers are the experts who work closely with legislators and track constituent input on issues.

**DO** practice what you want to discuss with the lawmaker in advance. Stay on message, stick to your key points, and ask specific questions. Decide questions prior to the meeting.

**DO** share personal stories with your legislator when it will help to convey your message.

**DO** leave materials and information on the issue and your organization or coalition with your elected officials at the end of the meeting.

**DO** thank whomever you meet with at the beginning of your visit and at the end. Follow up the meeting with a thank you note to everyone you met with, briefly re-stating your “asks”.

**DO** debrief with your group afterwards to compare impressions of what you heard in order to take accurate notes. Also, discuss what went well, what could have been done better, what questions still need answers. Don't forget to congratulate yourself for speaking out!

## DON'T

**DON'T** try to introduce everyone if you have a large group. Instead, say where in the district/city/state your participants live and the groups they represent.

**DON'T** argue with your legislator or the staffer. Make your points politely and stay on message. If needed, agree to disagree.

**DON'T** allow any one speaker or issue to take up all of the time (you might only have 15 minutes). Watch the clock and be prepared to ask if you may move on to another issue.

**DON'T** allow your legislator to hijack your time by focusing on issues that you did not come to discuss. Thank them politely for sharing, and then redirect the conversation back to your issue.

**DON'T** make up a response if you don't know an answer. Let the person you are meeting with know you'll get back to them. Contact your coalition partners to get the information you need.

**DON'T** get off message. Focus on a limited number of specific issues. Do not try to add in your own personal issue – it will dilute the effectiveness of your advocacy.

**DON'T** be intimidated by your lawmakers. As a constituent, you have every right to be there, to educate on your views, and influence their position on an issue.

## Guidelines for Submitting Testimony

Testimony is an oral or written statement offering a particular point of view, in support of or in opposition to a specific proposal. The format below follows general suggestions provided by congressional committees about how to testify at public hearings or submit a written statement for the record. Ensure that you check with your champion or with your local body's website for specific information about how to draft, submit, and present testimony for your community.

### Substance of the Testimony/Statement

#### 1. Heading

- a. Name of subcommittee holding the hearing, name of the full committee, name of the legislative body (city council, board of health, etc.) or name of department and agency
- b. Subject being addressed, including the number and/or name of the resolution if applicable
- c. Date on which it is to be presented or submitted
- d. Name of person presenting the testimony, their exact title, and affiliation

#### 2. Introduction

- a. Begin with identifying the person presenting the testimony. For example, if you are presenting or submitting it, include your name, residence, how long you have lived in the community, and your position/role with the organization on whose behalf you are speaking. Make sure to state your relationship to the issue, such as a volunteer, staff member of an organization, or concerned citizen. If statement is submitted for the record, start with a summary statement highlighting the salient points.
- b. Identify the organization you are affiliated with, if appropriate, including what it does, how many members it has, and why its members are concerned about the issue at hand. Refer to your organization's mission, values, and experience in the particular issue area. Special emphasis should be placed on the organization's local experience and needs as related to the issue under consideration.
- c. Express appreciation for the opportunity to appear/submit testimony.
- d. Summarize points to be covered, usually the general principles of your argument.

#### 3. Body of Testimony

Expand upon your major points with: data from research; experience from your own or the organization's community service and public affairs activities; information and examples gathered from other authoritative sources; and/or your own personal story and relationship to the issue.

#### 4. Conclusion

- a. Relate to specific legislation when pertinent and make clear whether you urge passage or defeat of the legislation.
- b. Reiterate appreciation for the opportunity to appear/submit testimony

#### 5. Cautions

- a. Oral testimony may have a time limit, sometimes changed "on the spot," requiring oral, extemporaneous summary of the written statement. To be prepared, have two statements (you will often be instructed to bring copies or provide your statement in advance):
  - ▶ A complete statement in full detail.
  - ▶ A summary statement highlighting salient points, in case the Chair asks the witness to summarize. (When asked to summarize, make sure you ask that the full statement be submitted for the record.)

- b. Only a person knowledgeable about the issue should testify. If such a person is unavailable, a written statement should be filed. Be prepared to answer questions or request permission to submit answers at a later time.
- c. If the witness lives in a city where there will be several sessions of the hearing on this issue, it would be helpful to attend earlier hearings or have a fellow activist attend and brief the presenter of the testimony.

## **Written Testimony**

*Check your local body's website or call their office to find out specific details on format and copies. The guidelines below should help you get started.*

### **1. Format**

- a. Heading should be typed single-spaced and centered.
- b. Testimony/statement should be typed double-spaced with wide margins.

### **2. Copies**

- a. Multiple copies (usually 50) are often requested by 24 hours in advance of the hearing.
- b. 25 additional copies should be prepared and available for press.
- c. Extra copies may be needed when submitting testimony for the record.

### **3. Follow-up after presenting testimony, or submitting statement.**

- a. Send a copy to your legislators, if appropriate.
- b. Send a press release to the media. If testimony is quite long, include a summary that highlights main points, with a copy of entire statement attached. If the testimony is brief, include the entire statement. Make sure you include your organization's mission statement.
- c. When asked to submit answers to specific questions, or to provide additional information, respond immediately.

## Guidelines to Write and Submit an Op-Ed

Op-eds express the opinion of the author on a particular issue and can offer an excellent opportunity to advance your local resolution. Knowing the basics of writing and submitting an op-ed will increase your chances of getting published.

**FOLLOW THE RULES.** All newspapers have guidelines for op-ed submissions that generally include a maximum word count (usually 600–750 words), exclusivity rules (requiring that an op-ed only be submitted to one paper in the country or in a specific region), and instructions for how to submit the piece. It is important to adhere to an outlet’s guidelines, particularly exclusivity. Many newspapers post guidelines on their websites. If not, call the editorial assistant or op-ed editor. While you have them on the phone, introduce yourself, share your idea, and ask if it would be a good fit for the paper.

**SUBMIT THE RIGHT STUFF.** When writing your op-ed, keep the following in mind:

- ▶ **Focus.** Don’t try to do too much. It’s better to develop and support one argument thoroughly, with plenty of detail, than to try to cover several more generally. By trying to say everything, you may end up saying nothing.
- ▶ **Support.** Your opinion needs to be supported by hard facts and, if possible, powerful statistics. This will give your op-ed weight and enable it to stand up to criticism. Be careful, though, that you do not overload your op-ed with numbers. Three to four key facts or statistics is ideal.
- ▶ **Illustrate.** A well-chosen personal story or real-life example will give life to your argument and demonstrate the human consequences of your issue.
- ▶ **Speak plainly.** You may be tempted to put jargon into your op-ed. Resist the temptation! For a clear argument, write as if you were talking to a friend or neighbor.

**EDIT, EDIT, EDIT.** Make sure that your submission does not contain abbreviations, acronyms, or grammar or spelling errors. Ask someone else to read it for clarity.

**SUBMIT AND FOLLOW UP.** Submit your op-ed, following the newspaper’s instructions for doing so. If you don’t hear anything after several days, follow up with the op-ed editor to see if your submission is under consideration. Ask if there are any revisions that you could make to increase its chances of being published.

- ▶ **If the piece is accepted,** work with the newspaper to edit it as needed. Once it is printed or posted online, distribute copies to any campaign stakeholders and interested individuals. Make sure you share it on social media as well, and tag your partners and champions!
- ▶ **If the piece is rejected,** ask the op-ed editor how you can improve future submissions. Newspapers sometimes commission op-eds, so developing a relationship with the editor can improve your future chances. If it is still timely, consider submitting the piece to another outlet.

## Guidelines to Write and Submit a Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor is one of the best ways to respond to articles, editorials, or op-eds on your local resolution. And, you can use these letters to advance support for your campaign. **A letter to the editor might amplify an editorial with which you agree, limit the damage caused by an op-ed that is harmful to your resolution, or highlight key information left out of an article.**

**RESPOND QUICKLY.** Timeliness is key. After you identify a story or editorial that needs a response, draft and submit your letter as soon as possible.

**READ PREVIOUS LETTERS.** Read letters to the editor published recently and mirror their format.

**FOLLOW THE RULES.** Look for guidelines about format, length, and other submission requirements on the paper's website or in the paper near the letters section. If you can't find them, call the newspaper and ask.

**BE BRIEF.** Keep your letter short and to the point. Focus on making one key point in two or three paragraphs and use just a couple of key facts or statistics, or a very brief story, to support your argument. Aim for about 150 words — never more than 200.

**KNOW THE AUDIENCE.** Familiarize yourself with what the paper typically prints. It is much more difficult to be published in a metropolitan daily newspaper than in a neighborhood weekly, for example. Try to relate the letter/issue to the local community.

**IDENTIFY YOURSELF.** Include your name and your affiliation with NCJW (or another organization, if appropriate) to be published with your letter. If you are writing on behalf of NCJW or another organization, make sure that you have the organization's support for your point of view and permission to speak in their name. For the editor's information only (not to be published), include your complete contact information.

**EDIT.** Proofread to eliminate typos and grammatical errors. Be sure to avoid jargon and acronyms.

**SUBMIT THE LETTER TO ONE NEWSPAPER.** Letters to the editor should be specific. Sending the same letter to multiple outlets dilutes the message and irritates the editors.

**GO FURTHER.** Distribute copies of the letter-to-the-editor, especially if it is printed, to any campaign stakeholders and interested individuals. Make sure you share it on social media as well, and tag relevant stakeholders, like your legislative champion.

## Guidelines for Writing a Blog Post

Blogs have become a widely used form of online media, giving anyone with an internet connection a way to share personal experiences and views. People blog about all kinds of things, including: food, movies, and their kids. Opinion blog posts are essentially shorter, more personal informal opinion editorials (op-eds). **As advocates, we are interested in opinion blogging, that is, changing readers' minds or starting a conversation on a timely policy issue.**

Here are some tips for writing an opinion blog post about an issue you care about.

**HEADLINE:** Keep it simple. The headline makes your point in a straightforward way. Simple and clear words will be picked up by search engines and attract more readers.

**LEAD PARAGRAPH:** Draw people in. Use a compelling anecdote and try to use your own, most personal voice — let the reader know you're an actual person. The opening line is important because people will stop reading if it doesn't grab them. Say something unexpected. Use a startling statistic. Draw the reader in with a dramatic personal story. Then introduce your main point.

**BODY OF THE BLOG POST:** Make your case. First prove your point with statistics, studies by experts, lessons of history, personal stories, or references to popular culture. Then use specific examples to build your argument — highlighting one or two specific events can sometimes be more powerful than trying to give an overview that is more general. Paint a picture for your audience to capture their attention and better engage them in the scene.

**CONCLUSION:** Call people to action. The conclusion restates the message and includes a call to action. Encourage your readers to learn more and share their views with elected officials.

**PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IS KEY.** Write in first person (using "I" statements). Blog posts go beyond conveying information to also sharing the personal experience or connection to what is being discussed. You have a unique and interesting perspective! Don't be afraid to share your reactions, and reasons for those reactions, to the issues you are discussing.

**SHARE YOUR PASSION.** Think about why you are involved and passionate about the issue. Even if you don't state your reasons directly, the reader should get a sense of why you are passionate, knowledgeable, and connected to this cause when reading the post.

**CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY. Your blog post can only be 500 words in length.** Studies show that online readers respond best to more clear and concise sentences that focus on a single idea rather than sentences that are long and more complex. (You can still use complex sentences occasionally, if needed, but a higher percentage of sentences should be simpler.) Use bullets or number your supporting arguments to make your post "scan-able." Keep your paragraphs short.

Adapted from resources created by Dupont Circle Communications: [www.dupontcirclecommunications.com](http://www.dupontcirclecommunications.com)

## Day of Hearing Tips and Considerations

**Because local resolutions are largely symbolic, participating in a hearing about the issue is one way to raise visibility for the issue you care about and increase the impact of the resolution.** Depending on the particular rules and practices of your local council, a hearing can take place before or in conjunction with a vote on your resolution. It can even take place before the council has decided they want to consider your resolution at all. Work with your champions on the council and your coalition partners to establish whether a hearing is a good idea and when it will be held. Then, decide together what you think will constitute a successful showing.

Below are some questions to consider as you plan a hearing for your local resolution.

### ► **What are you trying to communicate?**

Hearings provide an opportunity to frame the issue, lift up the values that underpin your resolution, and educate the public and policymakers about the real world impact of your policy proposal. Ask yourself what you want elected officials, the broader community, and press (if applicable) to walk away with at the end of the hearing. Is it concrete examples of how the policy impacts a core constituency? An emotional connection with the issue via a personal story? How a politically important partner is supporting your policy? **These decisions should drive the types of perspectives you seek out in finding people to testify.**

- Additionally, if it is important to demonstrate a large, united force in the hearing room even if testimony is limited, how can you achieve that? Will people bring signs? Will everyone wear the same t-shirt or button and sit together? If so, ask your champion to recognize you during the meeting, so people know which issue you are there to support.
- If building for a crowd, be sure to alert your supporters to key information they will need in advance of the hearing, such as when, where, or how to pick up signs or t-shirts needed for visibility. Similarly, divvy up roles among your coalition partners to help manage greeting and directing your supporters to the hearing room, handing out any signs, answering general question, etc.

### ► **What limitations do you have to work around?**

Work with your champion to determine the parameters of the meeting. Is there a limit on the number of people who can testify or a time limit on testimony? Is it possible to enter written testimony? Are there rules around signs or apparel for people testifying, or supporters showing up to the hearing? How many people does the room hold, and is the setup conducive to bringing a large group?

### ► **How will you recruit and support people to testify?**

- Who do you have in your network — both local organizations and individual stakeholders — who could provide quality, relevant testimony? And whose voice(s) are you missing? **Ideally you would have several people testifying to achieve diversity** — both in terms of lived experience (race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.) and perspective/stake in the issue.
- Testifying should be an empowering experience. It is also an opportunity to deepen the spokesperson skills and engagement of some of your supporters. If you cannot provide assistance to those who might need it, are there other partners (including NCJW, In

Our Own Voice, NIRH, or All\* Above All) who can provide drafting or editing assistance, as well as guidance or support around public speaking? Testimony should be brief and focused around one particular perspective, experience, or takeaway, rather than a laundry list of facts or a treatise.

- If someone is sharing a personal story or experience, make sure they are prepared for how their testimony will be used — being entered as public record, possibly being picked up by press, livestreamed, quoted on social media, etc.
- Will your champion be speaking on the resolution? How will you support them? By drafting or editing testimony? By working with them to set the tone? By offering to write a 1-2 sentence statement in case they are approached by media? Offering this assistance is another opportunity to reinforce the narrative you are trying to create.

► **How will you communicate to the rest of the world what’s happening inside the meeting room?**

- Using social media to lift up quotes; share photos of your champions, testifiers, and supporters; and to thank councilmembers for good votes is a great way to boost the impact of the resolution.
- If you are using a hashtag to track activity on your resolution, make sure to share it with your champions’ offices and your supporters in the room.
- Designate a few people in your group to be in charge of social media — taking and posting pictures and paraphrasing testimony or other statements for social media platforms. Preparing summaries of key points made in the testimony in advance is one way to help this go smoothly in the moment.
- It’s also helpful to pass out a half-sheet of paper that clearly lists the hashtag, some sample tweets, and the handles for any relevant spokespeople in the room, local elected officials, or even the handle for your city’s or city council’s account, so you can tweet directly at them.

► **How can you plan for the opposition?**

The opposition might be activated around your resolution if the issue is very contentious. In this case, it is even more imperative that you and your supporters visibly (and maybe even audibly) show up as a counterweight.

- Work with your champions to ask what kind of support they might need in the face of heavy opposition.
- Because it can be hard to know how many people will show up to testify for the opposition in advance, it is helpful to have a few extra people lined up to testify for your resolution in case they are needed.
- Make sure your supporters are reaching out to councilmembers asking them to vote yes on your resolution, and thanking them after the fact.
- Think through whether there are safety concerns you need to address.

## Maximize Media Attendance: Hold a Successful Press Conference

It is appropriate to hold a press conference when you have significant hard news to release — like the introduction or passage of your resolution — and want to convey it to a broad audience. **A successful press conference must be well-organized and present your news clearly and concisely.**

### THE LOGISTICS

- ▶ **Pick an easily accessible site.** Your location should be convenient for the media to access and, when possible, relevant to the news you have to announce. (For example, a press conference on a city council resolution may be held outside the city hall.) There should be enough space for the anticipated number of reporters, as well as any invited guests. Remember to obtain a permit in advance, if needed. Post signs to guide people to the press conference area.
- ▶ **Hold it at the right time.** Timing is very important for press conferences. The best choices for coverage are usually Tuesday through Thursday, in the late morning or early afternoon (between 10 am and 2 pm), so that reporters can meet their deadlines. Avoid competing with other events happening at the same time as your event. Contact your local Associated Press wire bureau to find out what is on its “daybook” — a listing of events happening in a particular area on a particular day.
- ▶ **Make it visual.** Consider the visual impact of your event — especially for photographers and TV cameras. Display a banner behind the speakers and on the podium. Be sure these are easy to read and on message. Where appropriate, use organizational logos.
- ▶ **Create a media-friendly set-up.** The set-up should include a podium and, typically, a microphone for the speakers to use when delivering their comments. Depending on your venue, you can also provide chairs for the speakers and/or attendees. Be sure the media have an unobstructed view of the speakers. And if the press conference is indoors, remember to leave a clear space and a place for TV cameras to plug in if needed.
- ▶ **Have an audience.** If space permits, invite your allies to attend, so they can be part of your work and also help share your message. Think about including other organizations or prominent individuals in the press conference to add appeal for the media.

### THE MEDIA

- ▶ **Invite the media.** For daily publications, send out a media advisory via email and/or fax three to four days before the press conference. Make sure to include wire services (such as the Associated Press) that have daybooks. For weekly publications, it is helpful to send information a few weeks ahead. And for all media, place a reminder call one or two days before the event.
- ▶ **Prepare take-away materials.** Prepare a press kit to hand out to media representatives at the event. Contents of this kit could include fact sheets, a press release (if appropriate, or the media advisory), materials from coalition partners, biographies of the speakers, charts, etc. Avoid overwhelming the media with too much paper — include only vital information that a reporter must have to write his or her story. And be sure to include contact information for

someone who can be reached after the event to answer any follow-up questions.

- ▶ **Greet the media.** Secure a table where you can welcome media representatives and have them complete a sign-in sheet with their contact information. This sheet will help you track which media outlets attend and provide easy access for any follow-up. It is important to have everything ready at least 30 minutes prior to your press conference. The media will often arrive early to set up equipment and review the press kit.

## THE PROGRAM

- ▶ **Use a moderator.** You should select a moderator who can introduce the speakers and facilitate a Q & A session with reporters. The moderator can also control the process and keep reporters on the subject. If a reporter digresses, the moderator can return the focus by saying such things as, “That is an interesting point, but we are here today to discuss...” The moderator should also be prepared, in a subtle and polite manner, to ask speakers who run past their allotted time to wrap up.
- ▶ **Prepare your speakers.** Usually, you should select no more than two to four people to speak. Each speaker should relay a specific part of the message — reporters do not need or want to hear multiple speakers repeating the same things. Speakers should practice prior to the press conference so they are well prepared and able to stay on message. Speakers should share their statements with one another in advance if possible.
- ▶ **Have an agenda.** Start promptly. It is unprofessional to keep the media waiting. The moderator should introduce the speakers, and then each speaker should talk for two to five minutes, depending on the number of speakers. Keeping the speakers to a short amount of time will help ensure they stay on message. The moderator should then facilitate a short Q & A session with journalists. The entire press conference should not last more than one hour, including the Q & A. Therefore, the presentation portion should be 20 to 30 minutes long.
- ▶ **Arrange individual interviews after the conference.** Reporters often want one-on-one interviews with speakers after the Q & A period. This is a chance to clarify or cover information not brought out in the Q & A. However, speakers need to continue to stay on message and keep their answers short and direct.
- ▶ **Follow up.** Make sure someone is available to respond to questions that reporters might have after the press conference ends and that you provide reporters with a phone number that they can call if they have any additional questions. Send thank-you notes to attendees, reminding them whom to contact for further information. And distribute press kits to key media representatives who were unable to attend.

## Using a Successful Local Resolution to Advance State & Federal Advocacy

Congratulations! You've introduced and passed a local resolution. You might be wondering: now what? The resolution is not only a great way for your local elected officials to take a strong stance on a social justice issue affecting your community; it also signals a culture shift (in support of your issue) to state and federal politicians. Here are some tips for how to use your local resolution when advocating at the state and federal level.

### Social Media

- ▶ Tweet and Facebook post tagging your state and federal elected officials to tell them that brave local officials support your chosen issue.
- ▶ Include a picture of the resolution or of activists testifying to make your post stand out!

### Mail to Your Lawmakers

- ▶ Mail a copy of your resolution and any press coverage to your state and federal elected officials. *(You should consider sending these materials via an email as well as through postal mail to ensure it reaches officials in a timely manner; postal mail may face significant delay in reaching federal lawmakers due to security screenings.)*
- ▶ If there is a specific federal policy that addresses your issue, ask for their advocacy on that specific policy issue. For example, if your resolution is about abortion coverage, ask your member of Congress to cosponsor the EACH Woman Act.

### Meetings with Your Lawmakers

- ▶ Bring a copy of the resolution to any in-district meetings (see below for more guidance) or meetings on Capitol Hill about the issue you're focusing on. The resolution shows momentum and engagement on the local level, which is crucial to many politicians' stance on an issue.

### TIPS ON HOLDING AN IN-DISTRICT MEETING WITH FEDERAL LAWMAKERS

An in-district meeting is a legislative meeting with your senator or representative when they are home from Washington. Summer recess in particular is a great time for constituents to voice their opinion without traveling, but there are a series of other recess periods throughout the calendar year, often around federal holidays.

- ▶ **Check out [NCJW's Tips on a Successful Legislative Visit](#)** (also available on [page \[x\]](#) of this toolkit) to make the most of your meetings with lawmakers. Make sure to bring the text of your successful resolution and any supportive opinion editorials, letters to the editor, or other press pieces you want to highlight.
- ▶ **Participants in the legislative visit** should include strong representation from the constituencies most impacted by the issue you are there to discuss. With abortion coverage bans such as the Hyde Amendment, for example, it is critical to center individuals who are immigrants, young, low-income and people of color. In addition, a faith perspective is often useful. Ideally attendees should be from the member's district. Usually, up to five people can attend the meeting with the elected official, however not all of them are required to speak. (See [\[below or page X\]](#) for roles participants can take during a visit.)
- ▶ **Sample Meeting Agenda**  
*Select one participant for each agenda item, and don't forget to assign a note taker!*

- **Introduction:** Give a short overview of All\* Above All, NCJW, In Our Own Voice or any other group(s) you are representing; state the purpose of your visit; and offer brief introductions (name/affiliation/where you're from).
- **Share a Story:** Share a personal or constituent story that relates to your chosen issue and its direct impact.
- **Make the Ask:** This should come from a strong and direct speaker who, while remaining polite, will not back down if given a soft response by the elected official or their staff.
  - SAMPLE ASK: Will you/the lawmaker cosponsor the EACH Woman Act?
  - SAMPLE ASK: Will you/the lawmaker support efforts to lift abortion coverage bans like the Hyde Amendment?
- ▶ **Feel free to answer questions,** but if you don't know the answer, simply say that you don't know and can follow up after the meeting. Write down the follow up question, and check in with your contacts at NCJW, In Our Own Voice, NIRH, or All\* Above All to see if we can help.
- ▶ **Share Your Visit on Social Media:** Towards the end of the meeting\*, ask the office if you can take a picture! Be sure to confirm their consent for sharing on social media. \*Note: For some offices, it is helpful to ask about photography in advance of the meeting; consider if you have advance knowledge of what the lawmaker's office prefers.
- ▶ **Follow Up:** Report back to us! Get in touch with your contacts at NCJW, In Our Own Voice, NIRH, or All\* Above All regarding follow up required with the elected official or their staff. However, each participant is encouraged to send an individual note or email to the office thanking them for the meeting, reiterating the "ask" and salient supportive points you covered during the meeting.

Note: If you plan to set up a meeting with a member of Congress about the EACH Woman Act, please email Kelsey Ryland ([Kelsey@allaboveall.org](mailto:Kelsey@allaboveall.org)).

## Accessing Technical Assistance

The **National Council of Jewish Women, In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda, the National Institute for Reproductive Health, and All\* Above All** are available to provide technical support to communities interested in advancing local resolutions for reproductive rights, health, and justice. This can include:

- ▶ Phone calls & e-mails to answer quick questions;
- ▶ Tailored strategy sessions;
- ▶ Assistance drafting resolutions;
- ▶ Editing testimony;
- ▶ Editing and placing Op-Eds and letters to the editor;
- ▶ Messaging guidance;
- ▶ Connecting with coalition partners;
- ▶ Other forms of assistance as needed.

**If you are an NCJW member,** contact NCJW Grassroots Associate Leanne Gale at [leanne@ncjwdc.org](mailto:leanne@ncjwdc.org).

**If you are an In Our Own Voice strategic partner,** contact In Our Own Voice Deputy Director Michelle Batchelor at [michelle@blackrj.org](mailto:michelle@blackrj.org).

**If you are not sure where to begin, contact Leanne or Michelle and they will point you in the right direction.**



## Appendix I: Sample Testimony

Testimony Draft  
Resolution 160828 Philly Public hearing  
Lexi J. White  
September 2016

Good Morning City Council Members,

Thank you for your time, attention and action towards reproductive health, rights, and justice. My name is Lexi White, and I am a resident of West Philadelphia in the Morris Park area. I am 24 years of age; an age deemed my “reproductive prime.” Through my own lived experiences and that of the women in my family, circles, and communities, I am increasingly aware of and disturbed by the ways that barriers to accessible reproductive health services deeply and disproportionately affect the health and well-being of Black Women, Women of Color, young women, poor women, and their families and communities here in Philadelphia, but also across the state of Pennsylvania and elsewhere.

I currently work here in Philly as an organizer and community advocate with an organization called New Voices for Reproductive Justice. At New Voices, we advocate for the full health and well being of Black Women, Women of Color and girls at the local, state, and national level.

Through the lens of Reproductive Justice and the practice of self-determination, we assert our basic human right to have children, to NOT have children, and to raise and rear our children in healthy, sustainable, and safe communities.

We believe that all women have the human right to make decisions about their reproductive health in the context of their full experiences including the right to access abortion healthcare, regardless of where they receive their insurance coverage, no matter their income or where they live.

I believe that in addition to continued strides towards contraceptive equity and comprehensive sexual health education, today’s hearing and the resolution it represents is a crucial, symbolic, and progressive step for the city of Philadelphia in the fight towards removing barriers on abortion access. To support this resolution is to support the health and wellness of all women, but especially Black Women, Women of Color and their families and communities here in Philadelphia, who disproportionately experience un-insurance, under-insurance, infant mortality, teen pregnancy and other intersectional health and wellness barriers. Thank you.

[Note: This testimony was offered in support of the [Council of the City of Philadelphia Resolution No. 160828](#), which was [passed unanimously on September 29, 2016](#).]

*Thanks to New Voices for Reproductive Justice for providing this testimony.*

## Appendix 2: Sample Op-Ed on Cook County Board of Commissioners Resolution

“Desperate.” That’s how one woman described her situation when she discovered that Medicaid wouldn’t cover her abortion. It took weeks for the woman to save and borrow enough money, delaying the procedure until the second trimester when the costs and risks were higher.

Since 1976, federal dollars have been withheld from covering abortion except in cases of rape, incest or to save the life of the pregnant woman. That precludes even a health exception for women who use federal coverage, jeopardizing the well-being of women with serious medical complications during pregnancy. Emboldened by a new anti-choice administration, Congress has already taken steps in 2017 toward making this disastrous policy permanent.

These unfair limitations are imposed not only on families enrolled in Medicaid, but also on women who qualify for other federal insurance programs, including military personnel, female veterans who receive coverage from the VA, federal employees, Native American women who utilize the Indian Health Service, women in federal prison and Peace Corps volunteers.

Discrimination in benefits for eligible women threatens what is, for many, an already-precarious financial situation. The unexpected expense of an abortion can have devastating consequences, particularly on low-income families who already struggle to pay for basic necessities like food and rent. And onerous state restrictions often impose additionally burdensome costs associated with long-distance travel, lost wages from unpaid time off work and child care arrangements.

That’s if a woman can afford to get an abortion at all.

Inequities in insurance coverage have created a social stratum in which access to abortion is dependent upon financial stature. Women without the resources to obtain an abortion may experience even more severe hardship: a quarter of female-headed households fall below the poverty line within one month of the birth of a child.

The reality is that if a woman can’t afford an abortion, it isn’t truly a choice. An equal and thriving society depends on women’s ability to decide when and whether to bear children — without politicians withholding the resources she might need to make that decision.

We are lucky to live in one of the 17 states that provides Medicaid abortion coverage using state funds. However, research shows that only a miniscule number of abortions in Illinois are actually reimbursed by Medicaid due to inconsistencies in the process. State employees and their dependents have no recourse at all: they are completely excluded from abortion coverage except under the most extreme circumstances.

More than 175,000 women of reproductive age in Cook County use Medicaid benefits and even more now qualify under Medicaid expansion. Tens of thousands of additional Cook County women receive their insurance through the federal or state government. These women are unfairly singled out from abortion coverage that is provided by the majority of private insurance plans.

The Board of Commissioners of Cook County wants to change that. They have adopted a resolution appealing to federal and state legislators to follow in the path that many others have forged by increasing public funding for comprehensive reproductive health care and reinstating insurance coverage for abortion care for every woman who needs it, regardless of the insurance she uses.

*Toolkit: Advancing Reproductive Rights, Health, and Justice  
With Local Resolutions*

It's not just Cook County legislators who are acting to reverse the inequalities. Elected officials in other localities across the nation — Boston; Cambridge, Mass.; Cook County, Ill.; Ithaca, NY; Los Angeles; Madison, Wis.; New York; Philadelphia; San Francisco; Seattle; and Travis County, Texas — passed similar resolutions in recent years.

These leaders are countering the vocal tide of anti-choice extremists whose policies hurt women and families. And they are joined by a surge of advocates urging Congress to pass the EACH Woman Act, which would lift the bans on abortion coverage.

The Board of Commissioners has a responsibility to lead on this issue and to demonstrate the full impact that autonomy in medical decisions has on women's health and economic stability. As Cook County residents, we all have an obligation to advocate for full coverage of abortion so that no more women find themselves in desperate situations.