



Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, *Director*
Susan Friedberg Kalson,
Chair, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

Arthur and Sara Jo Kobacker Building
2027 Massachusetts Avenue NW, at Kivie Kaplan Way,
Washington, DC 20036

202.387.2800 @theRAC RAC.org

January 3, 2023

Dear Member of the 118th Congress,

On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose nearly 850 congregations encompass more than 1.8 million Reform Jews across North America, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which represents over 2,000 Reform rabbis, I write to congratulate you on your swearing in as a member of the 118th Congress and to (re)introduce you to the Reform Jewish Movement and our policy priorities.

For more six decades, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (the RAC) has been the hub of Jewish social justice work, representing the values of the largest and most diverse Jewish denomination in North America. The RAC is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, and as such, our work is nonpartisan. We are proud of our work with administrations, Congresses, and elected officials of both parties, knowing that our success as a nation is inextricably linked to our ability to work together for the common good. Among the landmark laws that we have played a key role in shaping are the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Violence Against Women Act, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Affordable Care Act.

Our vision is of a world overflowing with wholeness, justice, compassion, joy, and equity. To realize this vision, we are dedicated to working across lines of difference to organize and advocate for social change that alienates systemic injustices, especially those that primarily impact marginalized communities. The words of the prophet Micah inspire us to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Our community is organized and engaged on issues at the local, state, and federal levels. There are Reform Jewish congregations in all 50 states as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Virgin Islands. In a typical year, we bring thousands of Reform Jews, including more than 2,000 young people, to Washington DC to advocate for social justice on a range of key issues.

In 2022, we organized *Every Voice, Every Vote: The Reform Movement's Civic Engagement Campaign*, a nonpartisan effort to protect, expand, and strengthen democracy. This campaign was guided by our belief that democracy is strongest when the electorate reflects the population – and it suffers when citizens are shut out from the democratic process. Focused on getting-out-the-vote among People of Color, young voters, and voters within our own Jewish community, our campaign reached more than



The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism is the Washington office of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose more than 800 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2,000 Reform rabbis.



730,000 voters in the primary, general, and runoff elections. We also contributed to key state ballot measure victories to protect abortion in Michigan, Kentucky, and Kansas; invest in clean air, water, and jobs in New York; pave the way for early voting in Connecticut; and secure access to drivers' licenses for all residents regardless of immigration status in Massachusetts.

Below you will find an outline of our legislative and policy priorities for the 118th Congress. We know there is a tremendous amount of work ahead as you confront the many challenges facing our world, and we hope to serve as a resource for you and your staff as we work together on issues of mutual concern.

We offer our blessings as you begin this new Congress and new year. Together, we can ensure that "justice rolls down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24).

Sincerely,

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner
Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
Senior Vice President, Union for Reform Judaism

Reform Jewish Movement Legislative and Policy Priorities for the 118th Congress

Below is an outline of the Reform Jewish Movement’s legislative and policy priorities for the 118th Congress. Please contact Associate Director Barbara Weinstein (bweinstein@rac.org) and Assistant Legislative Director Jacob Greenblatt (jgreenblatt@rac.org) to learn more about our priorities.

Antisemitism and Hate Crimes

As Jews, we understand how ideologies of hate give rise to violence. In recent months, Jewish communities across the country (including many within the Reform Jewish Movement) have faced verbal and physical attacks, threats of violence, antisemitic flyers left on doorsteps, graffiti and vandalism, and increased antisemitism online. In January 2022, members of our own Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas were taken hostage by an antisemite during Shabbat services. The Anti-Defamation League counted 2,717 antisemitic incidents in their 2021 audit – a 34 percent increase from 2020 and the highest number on record since the ADL began tracking such incidents in 1979.ⁱ This increase in antisemitism is spurred on in part by public figures who spew antisemitic tropes, vitriol, and Holocaust denial.

Antisemitism is inextricably linked to white supremacy, religious bigotry, and other forms of hate. Just as antisemitism is on the rise, so too is hateful rhetoric and violence directed towards other marginalized groups, including People of Color, LGBTQ+ people, and religious minorities. Our Reform Jewish community includes Jews of Color, who face a double injustice of antisemitism and racism.

However, the dramatic underreporting of hate crimes in 2021 make it impossible to tell how much hate communities are really experiencing. In 2021, 11,834 agencies took part in the hate crime data collection, a 22 percent decrease from 2020 and the lowest number of agencies in two decades.ⁱⁱ Notably missing from the agencies that reported are New York City, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and nearly all of Florida and California. We cannot prevent hate without knowing where, when, and by whom it is perpetuated.

We are grateful for Congress’ support of the Nonprofit Security Grant Program and urge Congress to fight all forms of hate and bigotry, including by:

- Supporting the bipartisan Pray Safe Act (S. 2123 in the 117th Congress), which would establish a federal clearinghouse of security best practices and grant opportunities for houses of worship and faith-based organizations
- Supporting the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act (H.R. 350/S. 4255 in the 117th Congress), which seeks to address the growing threat of white supremacist groups and other violent domestic extremists
- Mandating the reporting of hate crimes to the FBI to ensure the most comprehensive data
- Denouncing antisemitism, Islamophobia, religious bigotry, racism, misogyny, and all other forms of hatred and promoting and funding tolerance initiatives and programs (including Holocaust education)

Criminal Justice and Racial Justice

The Reform Jewish Movement is dedicated to the pursuit of racial and reparatory justice to ensure the dignity, equity, and safety of every human being is protected. Our Jewish tradition teaches us that we are descended from a single person so that no individual can say “my ancestor is greater than yours” (Sanhedrin 37a). Unfortunately, our country has yet to adequately address the years of injustice experienced by People of Color, particularly the Black community. The vestiges of enslavement and imbedded systemic racism nationwide continues to threaten the lives of Americans daily. The criminal justice system does not live up to its name and disproportionately harms Black and Brown communities in areas such as policing, pretrial, sentencing, and release and reentry.

In 2020, many Americans experienced a communal, national reckoning with systemic inequity after the death of George Floyd and countless others, increased anti-Asian rhetoric and hate crimes coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic, and continued discrimination against Hispanic, Latine/x, and Indigenous communities. We are grateful that the 117th Congress has worked to better support Communities of Color but are disappointed that no true reform has been enacted, and that race remains a contributing factor to the unjust treatment of Communities of Color who are present in our diverse Jewish movement and country.

We urge Congress to support legislation that recognizes and addresses the disproportionate harm Communities of Color continue to face, including:

- The Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposal for African Americans (H.R. 40/S. 40 in the 117th Congress) to remedy the impacts of enslavement and systemic racism Black Americans continue to experience
- Comprehensive police reform, such as the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act (H.R. 1280 in the 117th Congress), the End Racial and Religious Profiling Act (S. 597 in the 117th Congress), and other bills to make a more equitable criminal justice system
- The EQUAL Act of 2021 (H.R. 1693/S. 79 in the 117th Congress) and others to improve disparities in sentencing and drug policy
- The Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act (H.R. 262/S. 582 in the 117th Congress) and others to end the imposition of the death penalty sentence for violations of federal law

Economic Justice and Labor

Judaism teaches that safeguarding economic security and supporting those in need are fundamental obligations of *tzedek* (justice). We are commanded, "Do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your kin. Rather, you must open your hand and lend whatever is sufficient to meet the need" (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). The great medieval sage and Torah scholar Rashi instructed us to uplift our neighbors in times of need and "strengthen [them] as [they] begin to fall," preventing them from slipping into poverty in the first place.

We are grateful that the 117th Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which successfully blunted the worst economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including by temporarily expanding the Child Tax Credit. Combined with stimulus payments and other relief efforts, the expanded Child Tax Credit helped lower child poverty by more than 45 percent between 2020 and 2021, although

childhood poverty dramatically increased when the expansion expired at the end of 2021.ⁱⁱⁱ We also thank Congress for passing the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and increasing funding for unemployment insurance administration, nutrition programs, and housing assistance in the December 2022 omnibus appropriations bill. Unfortunately, the omnibus excluded a permanent expansion of the Child Tax Credit and other critical measures to improve economic security.

We urge Congress to support legislation that ensures equitable economic recovery and security for all workers and families, including:

- Permanent expansion of a fully refundable Child Tax Credit to cut child poverty and increase families' incomes as they cope with inflation
- The Raise the Wage Act (H.R. 603/S. 53 in the 117th Congress) to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 over 5 years
- The FAMILY Act (H.R. 804/S. 248 in the 117th Congress) and other efforts to ensure access to paid family and medical leave for all workers, such as the Job Protection Act (H.R. 6938/S. 3748 in the 117th Congress) and the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 2465/S. 1195 in the 117th Congress)
- The Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R. 7/S. 205 in the 117th Congress) and other efforts to close the gender pay gap
- The Supplemental Security Income Restoration Act (H.R. 3824/S.2065 in the 117th Congress) to increase SSI benefits for people with disabilities
- The Ending Homelessness Act (H.R. 4496 in the 117th Congress) and Fair Housing Improvement Act (H.R. 8213/S. 4485 in the 117th Congress), and other bills to increase access to affordable housing and end homelessness
- Reauthorization of the Farm Bill and efforts to combat food insecurity and ensure equitable access to nutrition programs

Environment and Climate Change

In February 2023, Jews worldwide will observe the Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shevat, dedicated to caring for the earth and all who live here. We are thankful for the 117th Congress' work in securing vital, watershed advancements in climate change amelioration, clean energy, and environmental justice through the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. The two laws will help the U.S. transition to a zero-emission economy by reducing our emissions 40 percent by 2030 – a huge step in the right direction. Our sacred responsibility to our children and grandchildren to pass on a beautiful, ecologically diverse world means funding necessary conservation measures that protect our natural treasures and all species who live here.

This commitment to environmental protection is more important than ever. In the last year alone, climate change has exacerbated lethal conditions and disasters such as heat stress and heat stroke, wildfires, hurricanes, superstorms, tornados, flooding, and more, causing death and damage all over the United States and the world. Due to decades of environmental racism, Communities of Color often experience these impacts at disproportionate rates. Congress must continue fighting the deleterious causes and consequences of climate change and historic legacies of environmental racism.

We urge Congress to confront climate change and promote environmental justice by supporting:

- The Environmental Justice for All Act (H.R. 2021/S.872 in the 117th Congress), which will empower communities to advocate for themselves and their needs through a community-driven process by creating new legal tools to challenge environmental racism, integrating environmental justice into Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act permitting decisions, strengthening environmental concerns throughout the executive branch, and investing in a just transition for communities historically dependent on fossil fuel extraction
- The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 2773/S.2372 in the 117th Congress) and Arctic Refuge Protection Act (H.R. 815/S. 282. in the 117th Congress, which would dedicate funding to protecting American wildlife and designate the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge a protected wilderness area
- Efforts to ensure that Americans benefit from the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, both of which represent a historic moment in America's shift to a zero-emission, clean-green economy, powered by American technology and commitment to environmental justice and just transition
- Continued or increased international climate financing (such as money for the Green Climate Fund), which is vital for the U.S. to make amends for our emissions choices and aid and protect vulnerable nations from the ongoing, catastrophic harms of climate change

Foreign Policy and International Religious Freedom

Last year's Russian aggression and military invasion of Ukraine was an affront to the rule of law and moral outrage for all people of goodwill. Since early 2022, we have commended the work of the Biden Administration, the United Nations, charitable organizations, and other supra-national entities in defending Ukraine's sovereignty, as well as the brave soldiers, aid workers, and others fighting for Ukraine. We are concerned about the ensuing refugee crisis and the increased risk of nuclear weapons use, and we are grateful for Congress' investment in Ukrainian aid in the omnibus appropriations bill. Jewish principles of just war teach that war is evil even if necessary, and that we must go to great lengths to avoid it.

The Reform Jewish Movement is also a steadfast partner in protecting international religious freedom. We are guided by Jewish tradition, which teaches that "God said to Moses: Is there anyone whom I do not respect? Whether it be Israelite or Gentile, man or woman, slave or handmaid, whoever does a good deed, shall find the reward at its side" (Midrash Yalku Lekh Leka 76). In recent years, we have worked to advocate for the rights of the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, China, and the Rohingya of Burma and Bangladesh in the face of genocide and crimes against humanity. We celebrated the bipartisan passage of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act in December 2021 and passage of the BURMA Act in the National Defense Authorization Act in late 2022, which will help the Burmese people restore their democracy and civil society and prevent the military junta from accessing funds to commit further crimes.

We urge Congress to uphold and defend international religious freedom by supporting:

- The Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act (H.R. 1630/S.1080 in the 117th Congress), which will help expedite the immigration process for Uyghurs suffering religious persecution seeking safe haven in the United States

- Measures that center the needs of the Rohingya, supporting their search for justice and accountability for the military junta, and solutions for the resettlement challenges they face as refugees in Bangladesh

Gun Violence Prevention

The Reform Jewish Movement has been a longtime advocate for commonsense gun violence prevention measures, and our youth movement took a leading role after the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School massacre in 2018. Last year, in the aftermath of the devastating gun violence attacks in Buffalo and Uvalde, we joined with our partners to advocate for the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act – the first significant gun violence prevention legislation in nearly 30 years. We were heartened to see bipartisan cooperation and commend Congress for passing this critical legislation. This law will help deliver mental health and school security resources, invest in communities hit hard by gun violence, prevent easy access of guns to people under 21 years old and stop gun trafficking, partially close the intimate partner loophole, and empower states to create and strengthen extreme risk protection order (ERPO) laws – saving countless lives and communities.

Despite this achievement, much work remains to end the shameful epidemic of gun violence. Judaism teaches that we must not stand idly by while our neighbor’s blood is shed (Leviticus 19:16). Congress can build on the success of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act to establish comprehensive background checks, reinstate the assault weapons ban, address root causes of gun violence, and promote safe access to firearms.

We urge Congress to prevent gun violence by supporting:

- The Bipartisan Background Checks Act (H.R. 8 in the 117th Congress) and the Background Check Expansion Act (S.529 in the 117th Congress) to require comprehensive federal-level background checks for all firearm purchases
- The Assault Weapons Ban (H.R. 1808/S.736 in the 117th Congress) to prohibit the purchase, sale, trade, importation, and use of assault weapons
- The Break the Cycle of Violence Act (H.R. 4118/S.2275 in the 117th Congress) to increase community violence intervention funding and ensure that communities hardest hit by gun violence can address the root causes in their communities
- Ethan’s Law (H.R. 748/S.190 in the 117th Congress) to mandate the safe storage of firearms on residential premises where minors and/or other unauthorized persons reside
- Efforts to fully close the intimate partner loophole, which was left partially open by the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act
- Robust funding for gun violence prevention research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institutes of Health

Health Care

For decades, the Reform Jewish Movement has been at the forefront of advocacy on behalf of universal health care. Jewish tradition teaches that government has an obligation to ensure that all people can access health care; in fact, revered medieval Jewish scholar and physician Maimonides placed health care first on his list of the ten most important communal services a city must offer its residents if the city

is to be found worthy for a great scholar to live there (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot IV:23). We are grateful for Congress' work to improve health care through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and the Inflation Reduction Act, but significant work remains to ensure all people can access care. We support the preservation of laws and programs such as the Affordable Care Act, Medicare, Medicaid, and CHIP, as well as efforts to expand access to quality, affordable, and equitable physical and mental health care for all. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing health care disparities, and Congress must address health inequities in Communities of Color, immigrant communities, Native American communities, and rural areas.

We also recognize that COVID-19 continues to pose a significant danger. Even as vaccines and treatments have slowed death and hospitalization rates, the United States still experiences hundreds of deaths and thousands of new hospitalizations and cases each day.^{iv} Aided by fading public health protections, the spread of COVID-19 places marginalized communities, especially immunocompromised people and people with disabilities, at heightened risk of severe illness and death, particularly as individual protective measures alone are often insufficient. At the same time, everyone who contracts COVID-19 risks developing Long COVID, which has already affected over 16 million adults and forced up to 4 million out of the workforce.^v We are disappointed that the omnibus appropriations bill did not include funding for COVID-19 response, particularly as the United States confronts another winter surge and the emergence of new sub-variants. Continued harm from COVID-19 is not inevitable, and we must not accept this needless devastation as our new normal.

We urge Congress to expand access to health care by supporting:

- Efforts to protect and expand Medicaid and CHIP, including closing the Medicaid coverage gap, providing 12 months of postpartum coverage and 12 months of continuous eligibility for adults and children, expanding coverage for formerly incarcerated citizens, and permanent funding for the U.S. territories
- The Mental Health Services for Students Act (H.R.721/S.1841 in the 117th Congress) and other bills to expand access to mental health care
- Robust funding to confront the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, including free and widespread testing, treatment, and personal protective equipment, as well as research into vaccine development and treatment for Long COVID
- The Health Equity and Accountability Act (H.R.7585/S.4486 in the 117th Congress), the Anti-Racism in Public Health Act (H.R.666/S.4486 in the 117th Congress) and other bills to address racial health disparities
- The Medicare for All Act (H.R. 1976/S.4204 in the 117th Congress)

Immigration and Refugees

The Reform Movement has long been committed to fixing our broken immigration system and ensuring just and compassionate immigration policies. No less than 36 times, the Torah instructs us on how to treat the *ger*, the foreigner among us. God commands, “The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:34). These teachings and our own history as descendants of immigrants and refugees, facing persecution and sojourning in foreign lands, inspire us to call for an immigration system that treats all people with dignity and respect. It is long past time to provide permanent protections –

including a pathway to citizenship – for DREAMers and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) holders, most of whom have built a life and lived in the U.S. for decades. We must also create a just and humane asylum system, welcoming those pursuing their legal right to seek asylum at our borders.

The world is also facing the worst refugee crisis in global history. More than 82 million people worldwide have left home to escape conflict and persecution, surpassing the record of displaced persons after World War II, and refugees account for about 26 million of those displaced.^{vi} The massive scope of the refugee crisis is a global challenge that requires cooperation from all the world's nations to effectively address. As a global humanitarian leader, the United States must play its part, demonstrating a commitment to robust refugee resettlement and funding for refugee relief.

We urge Congress to enact much-needed immigration reform by supporting:

- The American Dream and Promise Act (H.R. 6 in the 117th Congress) and other methods of providing permanent protections, including a pathway to citizenship, to DREAMers, TPS holders, and DED recipients
- The Afghan Adjustment Act (H.R. 8685/S. 4787 in the 117th Congress) to provide permanent protections for thousands of Afghan refugees who fled following the U.S. withdrawal and Taliban takeover of Afghanistan
- Efforts to create a just and humane asylum system. Congress must oppose legislation to restore or expand Title 42, the Migration Protection Protocols (also known as MPP or Remain in Mexico), and other restrictive asylum policies
- Robust funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement and helping make sure the U.S. meets its annual refugee admissions goal. Despite raising the refugee admissions goal in FY2022, the U.S. is only resettling 20 percent of this goal. Congress and the President must work together to make sure we meet this goal in future years.

Israel

As the largest and most diverse Jewish denomination in North America, the Reform Jewish Movement is dedicated to preserving a strong United States–Israel relationship. For more than seventy years, this relationship has helped ensure Israel's security, advanced American interests in the region, and enhanced international stability. We support a two-state solution, which is essential to preserving the Jewish and democratic nature of Israel and achieving an independent Palestinian state. To this end, we support foreign aid to Israel (under the parameters of the most recent Memorandum of Understanding), humanitarian aid to the Palestinians, and active United States involvement in the peace process.

We are deeply committed to a just, safe, democratic, and pluralistic Israel, which also serves as an essential U.S. ally. We are also very concerned by the inclusion in the new Israeli government of extremists with a history of words and deeds that are hostile to the rights of Palestinians, Arab-Israeli citizens, LGBTQ+ individuals, immigrants, refugees, non-Orthodox Jews, and others. Our strong belief is that this moment demands greater engagement with Israel, to strengthen the voices and efforts of those committed to the democratic rights and values enshrined in the Israeli Declaration of Independence.

We urge Congress to support measures that further peace in the region, including:

- Securing foreign aid to Israel and humanitarian aid to the Palestinians.
- Strengthening active U.S. involvement in the two-state solution and peace process
- Funding for the Iron Dome, which protects all who reside in the region
- Increased funding for peacebuilding initiatives, best exemplified by the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act (2020)

LGBTQ+ Equality

Judaism teaches that all human beings are created *b'tzelem Elohim* - in the Divine image – and deserve dignity and respect (Genesis 1:27). The belief that the stamp of the Divine is present in all humans is fundamental to Reform Judaism and teaches us that we cannot tolerate discrimination against any person because of their identity, including sexual orientation and gender identity. We are proud to join the majority of people of faith who support LGBTQ+ equality, and our clergy regularly perform and sanctify same-sex marriages, even as we respect the right of other faith traditions who hold different teachings to refrain from sanctifying such unions.^{vii} Nonetheless, the right to civil marriage must be equally applied, and we are grateful to Congress for passing the Respect for Marriage Act to preserve marriage equality for same-sex and interracial couples.

At the same time, more work remains to guarantee full equality. Most states do not have laws protecting LGBTQ+ people from discrimination, and there is no federal law that explicitly prohibits discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, federal funding, education, credit, and jury selection based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In 2022, state legislatures introduced over 300 anti-LGBTQ+ bills, many targeting transgender and gender non-conforming youth.^{viii} Without a uniform federal standard, this inconsistent state patchwork leaves LGBTQ+ people open to discrimination simply because of where they live. The heartbreaking epidemic of fatal violence against LGBTQ+ people continues; at least 35 transgender people (many of them Black and Latinx transgender women) were killed in 2022, and we mourn those murdered at Club Q in Colorado Springs.^{ix}

We urge Congress to support LGBTQ+ equality, including by:

- Passing the Equality Act (H.R. 5/S. 393 in the 117th Congress), which would amend existing civil rights laws to include protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity
- Condemning hateful rhetoric, violence, and legislation targeting LGBTQ+ people at all levels of society and government

Reproductive Rights and Gender Equity

In July 2022, the Supreme Court decided in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, leaving abortion rights up to the states. As a result of the decision, 26 states are likely to severely restrict or ban abortion. In fact, at least 17 states have abortion bans in effect, ranging from total bans to bans up to 20 weeks of pregnancy.^x Even before *Dobbs*, states across the country were enacting harmful restrictions on abortion care. Denial of reproductive health care can have disastrous consequences on one's economic security, and individuals in these states are now forced to travel to another state for care (facing costs associated with travel, childcare, and time off work), self-manage their abortion, or continue the pregnancy, putting their health at risk. Abortion restrictions

disproportionately harm marginalized communities and People of Color. Further, the enduring legacy of slavery and more than four hundred years of systemic racism have created racial health disparities across the United States. Nationally, Black mothers in the United States are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than their white counterparts, regardless of income, education, or other socioeconomic factors.^{xi}

Life is sacred in Judaism. Banning potentially life-saving medical procedures and interfering with a patient's decision-making and moral agency runs contrary to the Jewish commandment to protect life. This belief, combined with biblical and rabbinic emphasis on human dignity, has led the Reform Movement to view the life of the pregnant individual as paramount, placing a stronger emphasis on protecting existing life than on potential life (Exodus 21:22-23). Furthermore, regressive state laws that prevent physicians and other providers from providing health care is in direct opposition to the sacred duty to heal and provide care.

We thank Congress for the long-overdue reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which included important enhancements to VAWA that respond to the growing needs of diverse populations, promote survivors' economic security and access to safe housing, invest in gender-based violence prevention programs, increase access to safety and justice for Native American survivors, and improve services for survivors.

We urge Congress to increase access to abortion and comprehensive reproductive health care by supporting:

- The Women's Health Protection Act (H.R. 8296/S. 4132 in the 117th Congress) and efforts to create federal protections for the right to provide and access abortion care, free from medically unnecessary restrictions and bans on abortion
- The Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance Act (EACH Act) (H.R. 2234/S. 1021 in the 117th Congress) and other efforts to repeal the Hyde Amendment and provide insurance coverage for abortion care
- The Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act (H.R. 1670 in the 117th Congress) to repeal the 1973 Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act
- The Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act (H.R. 959/S.346 in the 117th Congress) and efforts to comprehensively address the Black maternal health crisis
- The Expanding Access to Family Planning Act (H.R. 8424/ S. 4550 in the 117th Congress) and other efforts to increase investments in the Title X family planning program
- The Right to Contraception Act (H.R. 8373 in the 117th Congress) and other efforts to codify access to contraceptives on the federal level

Separation of Church and State

The Reform Jewish Movement has long advocated for robust religious freedom rights and the separation of church and state, knowing one cannot exist without the other. This nation's constitutional commitment to religious freedom has allowed the Jewish people – and other religious minorities – to flourish in this country nearly unmatched anywhere else in the world. We unequivocally oppose any measures that target people because of their religious beliefs or lack thereof.

We urge Congress to oppose legislation limiting religious freedom, targeting people for their religious beliefs, or entangling the government in religious matters, including:

- Efforts to repeal the Johnson amendment, a federal prohibition on partisan politicking from the pulpit in place since 1954, located in section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code. Houses of worship must be able to fulfill their prophetic mandate of speaking truth to power, a role that would be undermined by allowing them to endorse or oppose candidates or parties for office via repeal of the Johnson Amendment.
- School voucher legislation. A central principle of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause is that adherents to particular faiths, and not the government, should fund religious institutions. When vouchers are used towards expenses related to religious school education, they become an indirect government funding of sectarian institutions.

Voting Rights and Democracy Reform

The freedom to vote is a fundamental right in this country and reflects a key Jewish value. Guided by the words of Rabbi Yitzhak, Judaism teaches that “A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted” (Babylonian Talmud Berachot 55a). Yet, over the past two decades, we have seen a continued threat to our democracy as states across the country have introduced, and in many cases, passed restrictive voting laws that limit access to the ballot box for millions of Americans. Since the beginning of 2021, at least 42 discriminatory voting laws have passed across 21 states, which disproportionately harm poor communities, People of Color, disabled voters, young and new voters, and other marginalized communities.^{xii} These actions, paired with various Supreme Court decisions that weaken the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the January 6th insurrection where white supremacists stormed the U.S. Capitol, have spurred further attacks on our electoral and democratic system.

We are disappointed that the 117th Congress failed to enact federal voting rights protections. Unfortunately, the outdated use of the filibuster has been used to obstruct our legislative process and silence minority voices in the Senate, which goes against our Jewish tradition that celebrates debate, the meaningful exchange of ideas, and respects minority viewpoints.

We urge Congress to work across the aisle to support bipartisan legislation that expands and protects the freedom to vote for all Americans, including:

- The various iterations of the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act (H.R. 5746 in the 117th Congress) which include the For the People Act of 2021 (H.R. 1/S. 1 in the 117th Congress), Freedom to Vote Act (S. 2747 in the 117th Congress), the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 4/S. 4 in the 117th Congress), and others to make the promise of democracy real for all Americans
- Efforts to enact filibuster reform if necessary to pass federal voting rights protections and restore the Senate to a functioning legislative body. This may include restoring the “talking filibuster,” eliminating duplicative opportunities and silent holds, expanding opportunities for amendments and negotiations, and lowering the number of votes needed for cloture

ⁱ <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2021>

ⁱⁱ <https://crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime>

-
- iii <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/09/record-drop-in-child-poverty.html>
- iv <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>
- v <https://www.brookings.edu/research/new-data-shows-long-covid-is-keeping-as-many-as-4-million-people-out-of-work/>
- vi <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>
- vii <https://www.prii.org/research/americans-support-for-key-lgbtq-rights-continues-to-tick-upward/>
- viii <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/10/14/anti-trans-bills/>
- ix <https://www.hrc.org/resources/fatal-violence-against-the-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-community-in-2022>
- x https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/us/abortion-laws-roe-v-wade.html?unlocked_article_code=m331HusnSf0MZsFjyqeJrwrIslYm1LHcO1-Pu5EVA9aQ-6hc3iGqhs5gdSbK61nIGvpXl1-QotB_INubk4_hJc2FrGk9SHIW0DLVaLK3oxrgQ0983cPnCzVtEfaDMDelxYHezOlrmvI5E671gtnFzIKPZbCV4BX-ePs_XPBmSCjLL-hRBLRywC5SJWTGt5zvN9onghF3v7Mtt0MROemVO332c6s-BYFT72XzHcjT4Yjs8DDO8i8FkeglWTEIG5tivI25VowleaSMvBaqBTC1RZ_WQ5BlbRxD_U5bkfnfGO6pkB2GQGWajv68zN7mW_ySVZ_X5DxGQ_401eJ_mUT8ak0prxVg3Y&smid=em-share
- xi <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/health/reports/black-womens-maternal-health.html#:~:text=Maternal%20mortality%20is%20three%20to,complications%20during%20pregnancy%20and%20childbirth.>
- xii <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-october-2022>