

## **ADVICE ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS, INCLUDING ABORTION**

April 10, 2022

Why punish those who seek or provide abortion services?

The time has come for the Religious Society of Friends, and the Friends Committee on National Legislation, to take fresh look at the so-called "abortion issue".

Legal experts are predicting that the US Supreme Court's decision in Roe v Wade will be abandoned soon. In many states, if that happens, abortion will become a crime. Young women, their families, and health care providers may be prosecuted and face imprisonment or other forms of legal repression. If Roe v Wade is abandoned, the abortion issue will become more urgent.

Quakers have maintained a policy of silence on the abortion issue while Roe v Wade has been the law. Some Quakers have stood against abortion on religious grounds, we could not reach consensus on the theology of abortion, and we chose a policy of silence. It was a convenient policy. While Roe v Wade was the law, we could afford to stand by silently while the US Supreme Court provided the protection and took the heat.

But when the court abandons its opinion in Roe v Wade, the landscape will change. The theological question will be less relevant. The new question will be: Why punish those who seek or provide abortion services? Silence is hardly a complete response to that question.

Traditionally, Quakers have not only supported the equality and dignity of women, but we have also supported fair and enlightened systems of criminal justice. Maintaining a policy of silence while our neighbors are punished for perceived immoral behavior has not been our tradition.

As we enter the new landscape, we need to develop a new response. Should we maintain our policy of silence while those who seek or provide abortion services are punished? Wrestling with that question must begin at the level of conscience, move through monthly meetings, and ultimately inform larger Quaker institutions, like FCNL. Our meeting is participating in that discernment, and we trust that other Friends are doing the same.

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Lansing, Michigan