

Why Has NCJW Undertaken a Campaign to Protect and Secure Contraceptive Access?

Plan A: NCJW's Campaign for Contraceptive Access is a natural outgrowth of NCJW's historic effort to achieve equal access to reproductive health-care services. NCJW's resolutions support comprehensive, confidential, and accessible family planning and reproductive health services, regardless of age or ability to pay.

Since its founding in 1893, NCJW has been working to advance the well-being of women, children, and families. For decades, NCJW has fought for the right of women to acquire and use birth control as a matter of conscience. When NCJW worked in the tenements and settlement houses of the early 20th century, it was clear that family planning was essential for women's well-being, just as it is clear now that family planning is vital to women's equality and economic opportunity.

NCJW was an early supporter of Margaret Sanger, the founder of the birth control movement in the United States, who said in the 1920s: "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother." In 1930, NCJW resolved to support access to confidential family planning as public policy, becoming the first organization in the US to publicly support the legalization of birth control.

NCJW's efforts to secure the right to obtain birth control appeared to have finally succeeded when the Supreme Court issued decisions that struck down state bans on birth control. In 1965, the Supreme Court ruled that states may not ban the distribution of contraceptives to married couples, and in 1972, it extended that decision to unmarried people. With the simultaneous advent of the birth control pill, women were empowered to take control of their reproductive lives.

These legal and medical developments alarmed birth control opponents and spurred them to organize anew in the political arena. Usually motivated by religious beliefs, birth control opponents were successful in electing like-minded legislators and influencing federal government policy — imposing their religious viewpoint on everyone through laws and policies that chipped away at access to contraceptive information and options. Private actions, such as the refusal of individual health-care providers and pharmacists to provide and fill legal prescriptions for birth control, gained credence and in some cases even legal protection.

Denial of the right to birth control has always been entangled in religious belief. NCJW believes that the exercise of reproductive rights is closely tied to religious freedom. Interference with family planning decisions denies a woman's right to be respected as a moral decision-maker and to make personal

decisions based on her own beliefs and traditions. For one religious view of reproductive freedom to be imposed on us all defies the very meaning of religious liberty and the First Amendment of the Constitution.

For NCJW, access to birth control, religious liberty, and women's rights are inextricably bound together. For these reasons, NCJW has launched Plan A, and will work to engage individuals around the country in a proactive, community-based campaign to ensure women's access to contraceptive information and services.

NCJW is a volunteer organization, inspired by Jewish values, that works to improve the quality of life for women, children, and families and to ensure individual rights and freedoms for all through its network of 90,000 members, supporters, and volunteers nationwide.