AROBSTION IS A REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE ISSUE FOR BLACK FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Over thirty years ago, 16 Black women courageously led a movement for reproductive freedom with the seminal brochure We Remember: African American Women for Abortion Rights in 1989. In response to the U.S. Supreme Court decision to uphold restrictions to abortion in the Webster v. Reproductive Health Services case, the brochure was a reminder that when abortions are made illegal or restricted, Black women disproportionately suffer life-threatening complications and even death. Furthermore, it placed Black women’s struggle for reproductive freedom in historical context - our struggle against intersecting oppressions during enslavement, Jim Crow, and the War on Drugs - and defined what reproductive freedom meant to them. We select on their legacy in this moment when the Supreme Court will rule on another case, Dobbs v Jackson Women’s Health Organization, seeking to restrict abortion in Mississippi and overturn Roe v. Wade during the COVID-19 pandemic, an ongoing maternal health crisis, and sanctioned actions that disproportionately take the lives of Black people.

I. ABORTION IS A REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE ISSUE FOR BLACK COMMUNITIES

Cisgender by U.S. Black women in 1994, reproductive justice, or the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities, is rooted in our experiences with and resistance to reproductive oppression. We have experienced forced pregnancy and childbirth, involuntary sterilization, restrictions to abortion and policies and environments that endanger and take Black women’s lives of Black people.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an ongoing maternal health crisis, and sanctioned actions that disproportionately take the lives of Black people.

II. UPLIFTING THE ACTIVISM AND LEADERSHIP OF THE BLACK REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Black-led reproductive justice organizations have resisted attempts to control the reproductive decision-making of communities and limit their access to healthcare that was true in 1989 when billboards were placed in our communities declaring Black children an endangered species in hopes of garnering support for anti-abortion legislation. Under the leadership of Loretta Ross and then Monica Simpson, Black reproductive justice organizations have the priority of making sure our families are safe and have the resources and decision-making power to do what is best for them.

As we are one year away from the 50th Anniversary of Roe v. Wade, we ask our allies to lead from the front. We, the signers of this document, stand firmly on the shoulders of the warriors who came before us and demand that women and pregnant people be spared the indignity of having others take away their bodily autonomy.

-We Remember: African American Women for Reproductive Freedom, 1989