40 years | chicago foundation for women

POWER IN OUR HANDS

A Collective Vision for Reproductive & Sexual Justice in Illinois



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“The world needs radical reproductive justice.”

– Dorothy Roberts



Executive Summary

This report presents the reproductive and sexual justice (RSJ) work being carried out in Illinois by the Reproductive Justice Champions Cohort (Cohort), a network supported by Chicago Foundation for Women (CFW). It provides an in-depth examination of key organizations, their services, advocacy efforts, and educational initiatives. Furthermore, it outlines key recommendations to solidify Illinois as a sanctuary for reproductive and sexual justice, offers strategies for strengthening grassroots organizing, and makes a compelling case for sustained financial support from foundations and individuals.

Introduction

Illinois has become a critical hub for reproductive and sexual justice, particularly in light of increasing restrictions on reproductive healthcare in neighboring states. Through the leadership of community-based organizations and the support of funders like CFW, Illinois continues to make strides in ensuring equitable access to reproductive and sexual healthcare. This report explores the work happening across the state and provides concrete recommendations for advancing reproductive and sexual justice.

Expanding access to reproductive and sexual healthcare has been a long and arduous fight, shaped by the tireless efforts of activists, healthcare providers, and advocacy organizations. The battle for reproductive and sexual justice in Illinois has seen both significant victories and setbacks, but the resilience of those fighting for equitable healthcare access has remained steadfast. With increasing attacks on reproductive rights, the need for strong advocacy and investment in reproductive and sexual justice organizations is more urgent than ever.



Chicago Foundation for Women

Chicago Foundation for Women is a community foundation that has existed for 40+ years and is focused on achieving gender equity, justice, and opportunity for women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals across the Chicagoland area. In its over 40-year history, it continues to provide funding for non-profit organizations addressing systemic inequities in its areas of focus: economic security, freedom from violence, access to healthcare, and reproductive justice. CFW believes that when women, girls, and gender-expansive people are secure, whole communities are made better.



Message from Chicago Foundation for Women's President & CEO



Keenya Lambert
Chicago Foundation for Women

Chicago Foundation for Women has been a cornerstone in funding and advancing reproductive and sexual justice initiatives. Since its inception, CFW has dedicated its resources to empowering organizations that work at the intersections of reproductive health, rights, and justice. Recognizing that RSJ is fundamentally linked to racial, economic, and gender equity, CFW has strategically supported programs that address systemic barriers to reproductive and sexual healthcare.

CFW's Reproductive Justice Champions Cohort is a groundbreaking network designed to strengthen the capacity of organizations led by and serving those working to address the persistent disparities affecting all communities, with an emphasis on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Through grantmaking, leadership development, and advocacy, this network fosters collaboration among RSJ organizations, ensuring a coordinated approach to tackling disparities in access to reproductive and sexual healthcare across Illinois.

Building on this legacy, Chicago Foundation for Women reaffirms its unwavering commitment to advancing reproductive and sexual justice across the region. The Foundation will continue to invest in the leaders, organizations, and movements that champion bodily autonomy, safety, and equitable access to care. CFW remains steadfast in resourcing community-rooted solutions, elevating the voices of those most impacted, and advocating for policies that protect and expand reproductive and sexual justice. Guided by its values and accountable to the communities it serves, CFW will work alongside its partners to ensure that every person has the power, resources, and support needed to make decisions about their bodies and their futures.

CFW's Commitment to Reproductive and Sexual Justice



1 Grantmaking and Financial Support

CFW provides unrestricted funding to RSJ organizations, allowing them to develop sustainable programs without the constraints of program-specific grants.

CFW prioritizes funding grassroots organizations that focus on advocacy, policy change, and direct services in reproductive and sexual justice.

CFW works in coalition with other funders that support the reproductive justice movement and its leaders. A key example is the IL BEGIN collaboration, which focuses on the intersection of maternal health, early childhood education, and reproductive justice.

2 Leadership Development and Capacity Building

Through mentorship and capacity building, CFW ensures that emerging leaders in RSJ receive the support and training necessary to navigate policy, advocacy, and organizational sustainability.

CFW invests in leadership programs that support all leaders, including BIPOC women and gender-expansive leaders of community organizations who are often underrepresented in policy and advocacy spaces.

3 Advocacy and Policy Engagement

Through its grantmaking, CFW supports grassroots community leaders who work with policymakers and coalition partners to push for RSJ legislation, such as Medicaid expansion for reproductive healthcare services and legal protections for reproductive rights.

CFW provides funding to partner organizations to conduct research and data collection initiatives that highlight racial and economic disparities in reproductive healthcare access, strengthening the case for policy reforms.



A Message from the Reproductive Justice Champions Cohort Members

The Reproductive Justice Champions Cohort (Cohort) lays the foundation for an array of rainbow voices resonating with the sounds of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Together, these voices rise in harmony as they usher in a better day for marginalized women and birthing people and all communities fighting for dignity and freedom. As members of this Cohort, we are deeply committed to advancing the work needed to ensure that every person in Illinois has access to the reproductive and sexual healthcare they need and deserve.

We believe in a future where families are able to thrive, not merely survive, and where every individual's autonomy, humanity, and right to live free from fear are affirmed and protected.

Now is the time to stand behind a collective agenda of reproductive and sexual justice that boldly resists the militarization of our cities, the illegal deportation of immigrants, and the ongoing erosion of democracy itself. The reproductive and sexual justice framework offers the most comprehensive vision for liberation, safety, and flourishing for all people. But we cannot do this work alone. We call on funders, policymakers, and community members to join us in investing boldly, legislating justly, and organizing together to ensure that reproductive and sexual justice are not only ideals but also lived realities across Illinois and beyond.

Call to Action



1

Community Members

Your voice, your organizing, and your solidarity are the heartbeat of this movement. By showing up, speaking out, and holding institutions accountable, you help create the conditions where all families can thrive.

2

Philanthropy

You have the power to sustain and grow the movement by investing boldly in grassroots organizations that are leading change on the ground. Your financial support ensures that reproductive and sexual justice are not just ideas but also lived realities.

3

Legislators

You can advance justice by enacting policies that protect bodily autonomy, dismantle systems of criminalization, defend immigrant rights, and safeguard democracy. Your leadership has the power to shift what is possible for generations to come.



Together, we can build a future where reproductive and sexual justice is not only a framework but also the foundation of a more just and humane society.

Defining Reproductive and Sexual Justice

"RJ's centering of women of color, social justice, and human rights provides a galvanizing moral reason for radical change and a concrete basis for building coalitions among organizations working toward a more humane society...The world needs radical reproductive justice."

– Dorothy Roberts, *Radical Reproductive Justice*

The quote from legal scholar Dorothy Roberts reflects the sentiment of grassroots activists across the U.S. about the impact of the reproductive and sexual justice framework. In making the case to strengthen the RSJ movement in Illinois, it is important to understand the historical origins of the RSJ movement. First, it is critical to highlight the role of Black women as the progenitors of a movement that ultimately created a paradigm shift in the way in which women of color would add their voices and intellectual labor to the struggle for reproductive and sexual freedom and autonomy. Second, to fully understand the broader contours of the RSJ movement, Illinois's prominence in the herstory cannot be understated.

The term "reproductive justice" was coined in July 1994 by 12 Black women who were working on issues of gender justice, reproductive health and rights, and international development, within a human rights context in the U.S. The women attended a conference in Chicago sponsored by the Illinois Pro-Choice Alliance and the Ms. Foundation for Women. The focus of the conference was the Clinton administration's proposed Health Security Act of 1993 to reform the U.S. healthcare system. Healthcare reform was one of three midterm election issues put forth by the Clinton administration, all with far-reaching racial and economic implications for people of color and young people. The other two were a complete overhaul of the welfare system and a crime bill that allocated massive amounts of federal dollars into mass incarceration efforts. Conference attendees were surprised to learn that the Clinton administration had left out provisions to increase access to reproductive and sexual healthcare. It was at that moment that the 12 women coalesced around an action—to call for greater accountability to the populations of women and pregnant-capable people who had historically been denied access to the full spectrum of reproductive and sexual healthcare and who continued to suffer horrific forms of reproductive and sexual oppression.

They decided to place full-paged signature ads in *The Washington Post* and *Roll Call*, a Washington, D.C. newspaper covering Capitol Hill. Two of the women, Winnette P. Willis, then board chair of the Chicago Abortion Fund (CAF), and Dr. Toni M. Bond, the first woman of color to be CAF's executive director, led the organizing effort around the signature ads in Illinois and Indiana. Over a two-month period, the group collected the signatures of 836 Black women, including prominent women like Alice Walker, Angela Davis, supermodel Veronica Webb, and all of the Black female federal legislators in office during that time. Among the notable Illinois women listed on the signature ad were the late Rev. Willie T. Barrow, civil rights activist and co-founder of Operation PUSH; Sandra Jackson-Opoku, American poet, novelist, screenwriter, and journalist; Mary F. Morten, consultant, filmmaker, activist, and President of the Morten Group; and Toni Preckwinkle, President, Cook County Board of Commissioners, and former 4th Ward Alderman.

The Four Pillars of Reproductive and Sexual Justice

Reproductive and sexual justice is simultaneously a theory, practice, strategy, and public health praxis that is grounded in four principles—every individual has the human right:

1

To have a child.

2

To not have a child.

3

To parent the child or children one has, with the social and economic supports needed to ensure families thrive.

4

To bodily autonomy and to experience sexual pleasure.

As a theory, it is used to transform power inequities, challenge systemic racism and white supremacy, and create long-term systemic change. Reproductive and sexual justice in practice and as a strategy is a systematic way to develop strategies of resistance and liberation. It is used to organize and mobilize impacted populations around efforts to address forms of reproductive and sexual oppression (e.g., LGBTQIA+ issues, abortion access, immigration, and welfare and prison policies) through direct services, education, policy and advocacy, and media messaging. As a public health praxis, RSJ provides an intersectional analysis of reproductive and sexual health issues linking them to the social, economic, and psychological impact of forms of oppressions like systemic and institutional racism, gender inequities, white Christian nationalism, and sexual orientation and gender identity oppression, for example. White supremacy and systemic and institutional racism have all contributed to the reproductive and sexual oppression of BIPOC and their communities.

RSJ's intersectional analysis illustrates how race, class, and gender function simultaneously to produce an integrative form of reproductive and sexual oppression. Reproductive and sexual oppression is the control and exploitation of individuals through their bodies, sexuality, labor, and reproduction. The RSJ theory has provided BIPOC and Africana, Latin, Asian, and Native American (ALANA) communities with a way to talk expansively about the "reproductive punishment" they have experienced, both historically and in the present day. Reproductive punishment summarizes the way that local, state, and federal governments and other private actors refuse to support quality healthcare services and resources but, at the same time, interfere in people's lives and decisions.

Framework for Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights & Reproductive Justice:



RJ Champions Cohort Organizations and Their Impact

BA NIA Incorporated

Mission & Strategic Priorities

BA NIA is a non-profit grassroots organization located on the South Side of Chicago dedicated to educating, encouraging, and empowering BIPOC women and all birthing people to make informed decisions about their reproductive health across every stage of life, with a vision of eliminating racial disparities in maternal and infant mortality among women of color. Founded in the mid-1990s as a learning circle for Black women supporting one another through motherhood, BA NIA has grown through years of study and practice to serve a broader community across the life course—from adolescence to childbirth to



menopause—providing culturally-relevant, holistic prenatal and postnatal services that nurture, support, and equip BIPOC women and LGBTQIA+ communities to make healthy, informed choices about maternity care, parenting, and reproductive health for themselves, their children, and their families. BA NIA operates based on the following core values:

Core Values

- **Holistic:** Physical, emotional, and spiritual health and wellness should be addressed in a connected, holistic way.
- **Culturally relevant:** Integrate traditional medicine principles with African wisdom and tradition.
- **Individualized:** Prioritize meeting women and LGBTQIA+ people where they are.
- **Self-determination:** Honor a mother's or birthing person's choices.
- **Community-minded:** BA NIA provides services to support not only babies but also fathers, partners, and extended family members, creating a sustainable impact that extends beyond its walls and strengthens the broader community it serves.

Key Programs & Services

- Birthing assistant (doula) services to support expectant mothers during pregnancy, labor, and during the postpartum period.
- Breastfeeding support and lactation support.
- Prenatal and postnatal yoga.
- Infant massage.
- Childbirth education classes.
- Rite of passage.
- Baby naming ceremonies.
- Ancestral Seeds Certification Program (doula certification program).

Advocacy & Policy Work

- Leading campaigns for state-funded doula services under Medicaid.
- Researching and publishing maternal mortality disparities.
- Spearheading the Chicago Illinois Doula Coalition Network (CIDCN) to standardize and expand access to doula care—especially for Black, Brown, and Indigenous families.

Equal Hope

Mission & Strategic Priorities

Founded in 2008, Equal Hope's mission is to eliminate health inequities and save lives through research, quality improvements, advocacy, education, and patient navigation. Grounded in a reproductive justice framework, it believes that all people, regardless of race, income, language, or immigration status, deserve access to comprehensive, respectful, and life-affirming healthcare.

Through its community-centered approach, Equal Hope builds relationships of trust to identify and address barriers to care, centering the lived experiences of historically underserved populations. Equal Hope works to ensure that everyone can access preventive and reproductive health services while advancing the systems-level change necessary to achieve health equity.

Equal Hope also ensures women's reproductive health with a focus on healthy living and emphasizes care across the reproductive lifespan to improve outcomes for parents and children alike.

Key Programs & Services

- Free breast and cervical cancer screenings and patient navigation for uninsured and underinsured communities.
- Patient navigation addressing social determinants of health, including free transportation, language interpretation, and culturally-relevant support.
- Reproductive health education programs to reduce reproductive cancer mortality and burden of disease.
- Navigation and care coordination to ensure continuity of care from preventive visits to treatment.
- Community outreach and education to equip individuals with the knowledge to advocate for their health.
- Partnerships with community health clinics to improve the delivery of reproductive health services
- Research and data collection that highlight inequities and inform interventions and policy reform.

Advocacy & Policy Work

Equal Hope's advocacy seeks to dismantle systemic inequities while ensuring equitable access to preventive and reproductive health services. Its ongoing efforts include:

- Campaigns to expand Medicaid coverage for preventive reproductive health and access to preventive vaccinations, such as the HPV vaccination.
- Legislative advocacy for policies like the BEST Act and the Cervical Cancer Reduction Act.
- Efforts to increase state funding for reproductive cancer prevention programs.



EverThrive Illinois

Mission & Strategic Priorities

EverThrive IL strives to achieve reproductive justice for all people, especially those most impacted by systemic disinvestment and discrimination. Achieving this mission means that every person in Illinois has the support necessary to determine if, when, and how to become a parent and to parent their children in safe and sustainable communities.

In confronting and seeking to remedy the impact of racial and economic inequity in our health ecosystem, EverThrive partners with communities to learn about their needs and amplify their voices and fosters collaboration between community members, healthcare providers, social service professionals, and elected officials to advance health equity in Illinois. Each year, EverThrive reaches thousands of individuals through community outreach, trainings for healthcare providers and social services agencies, and coalition work and advocacy.

EverThrive's strategy combines advocacy, community engagement, and strategic partnerships to drive holistic healthcare solutions and ensure that the communities most impacted by healthcare injustices are engaged in developing those solutions.



Core Values

At the heart of EverThrive's work are four strategic priorities:

- Ensure that pregnant and postpartum people in Black and Brown communities receive the high-quality care and services they need to have safe and healthy births.
- Guarantee all people have access to high-quality, affordable health insurance and the holistic healthcare that they need to thrive.
- Build systems that meet the economic, social, structural, and other needs of families and communities to improve health and well-being.
- Expand EverThrive's community of partners and supporters statewide to build power and advance reproductive justice.

Key Programs & Services

- Community outreach programs provide education on contraception, prenatal care, and reproductive rights.
- Training for healthcare professionals on best practices for equitable reproductive care.
- Initiatives to address Black maternal health disparities, including targeted outreach programs.

Advocacy & Policy Work

- Legislative advocacy for comprehensive sexual health education in Illinois schools.
- Campaigns for Medicaid expansion to include broader maternal healthcare services.
- Partnerships with state health agencies to address disparities in maternal and infant mortality.

Healing to Action

Mission & Strategic Priorities

Healing to Action's (HTA) mission is to end gender-based violence (GBV) by building the leadership and collective power of the communities most impacted: immigrants; Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; low-wage/low-income people; LGBTQIA+ individuals; and survivors with disabilities. Healing to Action's innovative model supports survivors in their journey to become critical leaders in the movement to end GBV. Healing to Action defines GBV as actions intended to punish someone for failing to conform to societal gendered expectations. Actions can include harassment, domestic violence, sexual assault, financial control, reproductive control/harm, and LGBTQIA+ violence.

Healing to Action achieves its mission through individual, community, and institutional strategies. At the individual level, survivors develop their leadership through the Healing Generations (HG) program. Through this eight-week program—designed by and for survivors—HTA educates survivors about root causes of GBV, builds their leadership and organizing skills so they can reach other isolated survivors, and trains them on core principles of peer outreach and survivor support.

At the community level, HTA supports dynamic grassroots campaigns to end GBV that are developed and led by HG graduates through SexEd Works, a survivor-led campaign that addresses the racial and economic disparities in accessing comprehensive sexual health and consent education—a proven strategy for preventing GBV and peer-to-peer outreach work, a growing network of healing and support for survivors. Building their skills through HG has positioned HTA graduates as access points for other survivors

in their communities. In 2023, HTA's active base of 27 survivor-leaders launched peer-to-peer outreach strategies, and, as a result, 378 survivors disclosed their experience of harm, and 262 survivors were connected to individual services and community resources.

At the institutional level, HTA builds the capacity of racial, economic, reproductive, and social justice organizations to mobilize survivor-led solutions. Through its Survivor Power Institute (SPI), HTA brings together a cohort of organizers and advocates across social justice disciplines for an intensive two-day training on survivor-leadership, with six months of post-program coaching support.

As a grassroots, survivor-led organization that prioritizes intersectionality, HTA sees itself working in preventing GBV and



building a network of survivors as critical to the reproductive justice movement. One key HTA value is seeing its struggles as interconnected, which "recognizes that we each bring specific experiences of privilege and oppression to our work."

HEART Women & Girls

Mission & Strategic Priorities

HEART is one of the only Muslim-led, national advocacy organizations that builds power with survivors, communities, and institutions to advance reproductive justice and uproot gendered violence by establishing access and choice for the most impacted Muslims. By offering accurate sexual and reproductive health and gendered violence education, advocacy, research, and training, HEART mobilizes people to become agents of change in their own communities and connects them to a network to sustain their empowerment. Its workshops and trainings have reached over 20,000 people across the country, including 20 campuses and 1,200 students.

With ongoing programming in Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., HEART has blossomed into a national movement-focused organization with six paid staff members and a larger network of trainers, volunteers, and educators. HEART is building a world where all Muslims are safe and exercise self-determination over their reproductive lives in communities where they live, work, and pray. In a time where gendered Islamophobia is at its height, and the attacks on reproductive freedom increase across the U.S. and incidences of gendered violence persist in Muslim communities, HEART is standing firm in its commitment to advance reproductive justice and end gendered violence from a systems level.



Key Programs & Services

- Mobilizing Muslim communities to end gendered and reproductive violence at the systems level through coalition building, developing resources to inspire Muslim communities into action, voter education, and building the capacity of individuals and organizations to be agents of change in their communities.
- For over a decade, HEART has provided comprehensive, culturally-sensitive, and faith-inspired sexual health and sexual violence information and support through interactive in-person and virtual programming, digital education, and direct survivor advocacy.
- Deepening broader institutional capacity by building the capacity of Muslim and non-Muslim leaders and professionals through research and training.
- HEART is an organization led by directly impacted people and prioritizes strengthening its organizational health and capacity to build a culture of care internally. HEART aims to do this by developing pay equity and career advancement policies, expanding staff benefits, and developing an intersectional anti-oppression lens.
- HEART Reproductive Agency Honoring Impacted Muslims (RAHIM) supports Muslims through all stages of reproductive life, including sexual dysfunction, abortion, pregnancy, and fertility.



(Re)Birth Society



Mission & Strategic Priorities

(Re)Birth Society is a community-led organization committed to wellness, education, justice, and empowerment. Its mission is to improve the ecosystem of reproductive and environmental care for members of the African Diaspora and Indigenous communities in Chicago through land and community stewardship.

Core Values

(Re)Birth Society holds the following key values at the forefront of its work:

- **Reproductive & Sexual Justice:** Providing resources, education, and support necessary for individuals to make informed decisions about their sexuality, gender, and reproductive and sexual healthcare—free from coercion, discrimination, violence, or repercussion.
- **Afro-Ecology:** Afro-Ecology (re)recognizes humans as co-creators within the planet's life-support systems and centers Afro-Indigenous experiences and ways of knowing. It is a vision rooted in the agrarian traditions, legacies, and struggles of the Black experience in the Americas.
- **Full Life Holistic Wellness:** Affirming the fundamental right to holistic wellness by centering rest, joy, play, creativity, movement, spirituality, and traditional healing modalities as acts of colonial resistance that uplift, empower, and support its community members.
- **Education & Cultural Awareness:** Ensuring that people have access to quality education, learning incentives, and intergenerational learning opportunities and are equipped with knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that will guide them toward making informed decisions throughout their lifetime.

- **Intergenerational Community Stewardship:** Affirming the human and cultural right to safe and sustainable multigenerational communities that thrive regeneratively.

Key Programs & Services

- Free Doula Support Programs: For women, birthing people, and families with financial barriers that prevent access to doula care and birth support.
- Birth Basket Donations: For marginalized communities, providing them with essentials such as diapers, first aid kits, wellness tools, and self-care essentials.
- Life Cycles: Gardening Education Program: Taking a practical, interactive approach to teaching youth about land and community stewardship through garden immersion.
- Wellness Events and Spaces: Affordable, accessible gatherings that connect community, encourage learning and leisure, showcase creativity, and celebrate culture and continuity.
- Food Security and Agricultural Freedom Initiative: Bridging gaps between locally-grown whole foods, growers and farmers, and under-resourced communities.

Sexpectations Chicago

Mission & Strategic Priorities

Sexpectations Chicago is a Black and Brown collective that provides sexual health education to Black and Brown youth in Chicago. Sexpectations's mission is to empower people in their journey of becoming advocates for their sexual and reproductive health. Sexpectations believes bodily autonomy and healthcare are human rights and that community education, collaboration, and organizing are revolutionary tools for liberation. It centers safety, equity, harm reduction, consent, and young people of color in its work. Sexpectations recognizes that systems of colonization and racism disproportionately harm and marginalize Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities and that these structures impact their sexual health. Sexpectations further believes that all individuals deserve the opportunity to flourish and exist in communities of care, healing, and joy.

Key Programs & Services

- Sexpectations advances its goal through its 12-lesson sexual health education curriculum, which cultivates an inclusive and affirming environment that sparks dialogue and learning to build safe and sustainable communities. We work in 6th to 12th grade classrooms.
- Sexpectations works to bridge the gap in education with adults as well through adult workshops, lectures, and community engagement.

Through its curriculum, Sexpectations addresses sexual and gender-based violence, motivating participants to continue these conversations with their peers, families, and community members. This information is offered in both English and Spanish to ensure the relevancy of this work and to allow participants to discuss these topics with Spanish speakers at home or in their community.

Sexpectations strives to empower young people, especially Black and

Brown youth, with the tools they need to make informed decisions about their lives. Participants learn about their bodies, identities, boundaries, and health in a space that is non-prescriptive, inclusive, and sex positive.

Education is the foundation of organizing and advocacy, and its work provides the historic and present context for building an equitable future. Sexpectations believes its work prompts young people to think about communication, bodily autonomy, and advocating for rights and ideas which connect to the larger reproductive justice movement.



Laying the Foundation for Reproductive Justice in Illinois

One of the most significant figures to emerge from Illinois during this period was Dr. Toni M. Bond, a co-founder of the RSJ movement and a trailblazer in addressing the intersection of race, gender, and reproductive health. Dr. Bond, alongside other Black women leaders, helped define RSJ as a framework that extended beyond abortion rights to encompass the right to have children, not have children, parent in safe and healthy environments, and bodily autonomy and sexual pleasure and expression.



Dr. Toni M. Bond

Reproductive & Sexual Justice Founding Mother

Dr. Bond was also the first woman of color to be named as Executive Director of the Chicago Abortion Fund (CAF) in 1994. She expanded the organization's mission to align with RSJ principles. Under her leadership, CAF moved beyond simply funding abortion care and began advocating for systemic changes that addressed the economic, racial, and social inequalities impacting access to reproductive healthcare. This shift helped to place Illinois at the forefront of a broader RSJ movement, challenging the mainstream pro-choice movement to center the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

In 1997, Dr. Bond and another RSJ founding mother, Winnette Willis, co-founded Black Women for Reproductive Justice (BWRJ), one of the most influential organizations in the Illinois RSJ movement. A CFW grantee, BWRJ was the first Black reproductive justice organization in the country. The group led educational initiatives, advocacy campaigns, and annual health conferences that focused on the unique reproductive and sexual health needs of Black women. BWRJ played a crucial role in advancing policies that expanded access to reproductive and sexual healthcare and challenged systemic barriers.

The 2020s: Defending and Expanding Reproductive Justice in a Post-Roe Era

Following the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision in 2022, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*, Illinois became a crucial safe haven for abortion access in the Midwest. With states like Missouri, Kentucky, and Indiana enacting near-total abortion bans, Illinois clinics saw a massive influx of out-of-state patients seeking care.

Today, Illinois remains a leader in reproductive rights and justice, continuing to push for policies that expand equitable access to care. With ongoing threats from anti-abortion forces, activists remain vigilant in defending the gains made over the past three decades while working toward a future where reproductive justice is fully realized for all.



The History of Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice Activism in Illinois

(1990–2026)



Illinois has played a crucial role in the national landscape of reproductive health, rights, and justice, serving as a progressive stronghold in the Midwest. From the early 1990s through 2026, advocates, policymakers, and grassroots organizers have worked to expand access to reproductive healthcare, protect abortion rights, and address racial and economic disparities in reproductive justice. This activism has been shaped by key legal battles, landmark legislation, and the persistent efforts of individuals and organizations committed to reproductive freedom.

One of the most significant battles in Illinois's reproductive rights history was the effort to restore abortion care at Cook County Hospital. In the early 1990s, Illinois reproductive health and rights activists fought tirelessly to reinstate abortion services at the public hospital, which had been unavailable for nearly two decades. Their success in 1992 marked a major victory for reproductive healthcare access for low-income individuals in Chicago.

Parental Notification

During the 1990s, Illinois was at the center of both defensive and proactive reproductive rights battles. The 1975 Illinois Parental Notice of Abortion Act (PNA), which required minors to notify a parent before obtaining an abortion, remained a legal and political flashpoint. Although the law was passed in the 1970s, it was repeatedly blocked by courts, leading to ongoing advocacy efforts to prevent its enforcement. The Illinois Supreme Court's decision in 2005 to allow the Parental Notice of Abortion Act to be enforced marked a major setback, disproportionately affecting young people of color. Reproductive and sexual justice leaders mobilized against PNA, working with organizations such as the ACLU of Illinois, Planned Parenthood of Illinois, and Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health (ICAH) to mitigate its impact. They provided legal assistance, education, and direct support to young people navigating the judicial bypass process.

A pivotal moment came in 2013 when the state fully enforced the Parental Notice of Abortion Act, a move that RSJ activists, including RSJ Founding Mother, Dr. Bond, fiercely opposed. Reproductive and sexual justice organizations worked tirelessly to support young people impacted by the law, highlighting how it disproportionately harmed

Black and Brown communities.

Abortion Access

The movement for reproductive and sexual justice did not occur in a vacuum. There were several significant historical moments along the reproductive health and rights timeline that led to the creation of the movement and, eventually, the formation of a theoretical framework. Illinois holds a prominent, albeit precarious, position on that timeline. The U.S. Supreme Court's landmark ruling in the matter of *Roe v. Wade* (overturned on June 24, 2022) held that the Constitution protected a woman's right to have an abortion without undue governmental interference. Unfortunately, the celebration of Roe was short-lived with the passage of the Hyde Amendment in 1976. Named after Illinois Republican Rep. Henry Hyde, the Hyde Amendment banned the use of Medicaid to pay for abortions except under certain narrow exceptions such as the life of the woman, rape, or incest. Since its passage, populations that have been the most affected have been low-income women, women of color, young women, and women in the military. The Hyde Amendment has dramatically affected the lives of BIPOC and ALANA individuals across the country. Through the work of Illinois advocates, Illinois provides Medicaid coverage for abortion.

A major victory came in 2017 when Governor Bruce Rauner signed House Bill 40 (HB 40) into law, repealing Illinois's abortion "trigger law" and ensuring that abortion would remain legal in the state even if *Roe v. Wade* was overturned. HB 40 also expanded Medicaid coverage for abortion care, aligning with RSJ principles by making abortion more financially accessible to low-income people. Decades of activism and advocacy by activists such as Mary F. Morten, Dr. Bond, Dr. Gaylon Alcaraz, Sue Purrington, and others helped set the stage for this policy victory.

Another key moment came in 2019 with the passage of the Reproductive Health Act (RHA), signed into law by Governor JB Pritzker. The RHA repealed outdated abortion restrictions, affirmed abortion as a fundamental right, and expanded access to reproductive healthcare. This law solidified Illinois as a reproductive rights sanctuary in the Midwest, even as neighboring states imposed severe abortion bans.

Governor Pritzker and other Democratic lawmakers passed legislation to further protect abortion providers and patients from legal threats posed by anti-abortion states. In 2023, Illinois enacted protections for healthcare providers offering gender-affirming and reproductive care, preventing extradition or prosecution of those assisting patients from restrictive states. A landmark victory for reproductive and sexual justice came in 2021 when Illinois repealed the Parental Notice of Abortion Act, a long-fought battle by reproductive health, rights, and justice activists. This repeal removed a significant barrier to abortion access for minors, aligning Illinois with its commitment to reproductive freedom.

In 2024, the Birth Equity Act was signed into law mandating insurance coverage for abortion, pregnancy, postpartum, and newborn care without extra costs. This law ensures Medicaid reimbursement for doulas, lactation consultants, and home visitors.

In 2025, Illinois further strengthened access to reproductive healthcare by signing laws requiring public universities to provide on-campus medication abortion and contraception and expanding legal protections for providers. Key legislation was also passed to include comprehensive insurance coverage for abortion services and enhanced legal safeguards against out-of-state investigations for reproductive healthcare.



A Community Call to Action:

Advancing Reproductive and Sexual Justice in Our Communities

Achieving reproductive and sexual justice requires collective commitment and sustained action from community members, advocates, institutions, and policymakers. Everyone has a role to play in building communities where bodily autonomy, safe families, and equitable healthcare are protected and accessible to all. The following four steps offer concrete ways individuals and communities can actively support and advance this work:



Support Reproductive Justice Organizations

Invest in the organizations doing frontline work by donating, volunteering, or amplifying their efforts. Grassroots groups—especially those led by communities most impacted by reproductive and sexual health inequities—are essential to providing direct services, education, and advocacy.

Advocate for Reproductive Justice Policies

Engage with local and state policymakers to support legislation that protects abortion access, expands maternal healthcare, funds doula and midwifery services, and ensures comprehensive reproductive and sexual health education. Calling representatives, attending public hearings, and participating in advocacy days can make a meaningful difference.

Educate and Mobilize Your Community

Host conversations with family and friends, support and attend community forums, hold conversations within your religious communities, and join other learning spaces that increase awareness about reproductive and sexual justice and the barriers many communities face. Sharing accurate information and elevating the voices of those directly impacted strengthens community power and collective understanding.

Build Networks of Care and Solidarity

Support pregnant and parenting people in your community by connecting them to resources such as doulas, childcare support, health clinics, and mutual aid networks. Creating systems of care ensures that individuals and families are not navigating reproductive health decisions alone.

Together, these actions help create a future where reproductive and sexual justice are not simply ideals but lived realities for every person and every family.



A Call to Philanthropy

Chicago Foundation for Women invites national and local foundations to join in supporting Illinois as a reproductive and sexual justice sanctuary. By increasing investments in grassroots initiatives, philanthropic partners can help expand access to reproductive and sexual healthcare, strengthen advocacy efforts, and empower communities to lead change. With continued financial backing and strategic collaboration, Illinois can serve as a model for reproductive and sexual justice nationwide. CFW has been a cornerstone in funding and advancing reproductive and sexual justice (RSJ) initiatives. Through its RJ Champions Cohort, CFW has provided critical resources, networking opportunities, and advocacy support for organizations leading this work.

Philanthropy plays a crucial role in sustaining and expanding the work of RSJ organizations. Multi-year, unrestricted funding is particularly vital, as it allows these organizations the flexibility to allocate resources where they are most needed, whether in direct services, advocacy, research, or grassroots organizing. Many RSJ organizations operate on limited budgets and rely on the support of philanthropic institutions to build long-term sustainability.

Unrestricted funding enables organizations to respond rapidly to emerging threats and pivot their strategies accordingly. It also empowers them to invest in leadership development, infrastructure, and community engagement initiatives, which are essential for long-term impact. When funders provide multi-year commitments, they create stability for RSJ groups, reducing the uncertainty of year-to-year grant cycles and allowing for strategic planning and capacity building. Moreover, philanthropists should consider funding intersectional work that connects RSJ with other social justice movements such as racial equity, economic justice, and immigrant rights. Providing financial support to organizations led by BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ groups ensures that the most impacted communities have the resources to lead transformative change for all women and birthing people.

Foundations and individual donors are encouraged to engage directly with RSJ organizations, learn about their work, and amplify their voices in broader philanthropic circles. By prioritizing flexible, multi-year funding and investing in leadership development, funders can help ensure that RSJ remains a robust and sustainable movement in Illinois and beyond.

Funding reproductive and sexual justice organizations in Illinois is not only about healthcare access but also about fulfilling the broader mission of justice that so many foundations already champion. RSJ work directly advances economic justice, gender justice, pregnancy and birth justice, abortion access,



contraceptive equity, and housing justice, demonstrating that these issues cannot be siloed. When funders prioritize RSJ, they are investing in a framework that addresses the root causes of inequity, dismantles barriers to care, and ensures that women, girls, and pregnancy-capable people have the freedom and support they need to thrive. Simply put, if your institution is committed to justice and reproductive health, rights, and justice, then RSJ must be part of your funding strategy.

The RJ Champions Cohort in Illinois is uniquely positioned to turn these commitments into reality. Cohort members are building capacity, strengthening leadership, and mobilizing grassroots power across the state. They are educating communities, organizing for policy change, and creating networks of support that ripple outward. RJ Champions Cohort organizations are not just defending reproductive and sexual rights in a time of national crisis; they are also proactively shaping a vision of thriving, healthy families and strong communities. By funding these organizations, philanthropy fuels a collaborative movement that makes Illinois a model for reproductive and sexual justice nationwide. Including RSJ groups in your funding portfolio is both a moral imperative and a strategic investment in lasting justice and equity.

Sustainable funding is critical for reproductive justice organizations to operate effectively. The RJ Champions Cohort seeks to:

Establish long-term financial partnerships with foundations and donors committed to reproductive justice.

Advocate for multi-year, unrestricted funding to allow organizations the flexibility to adapt to emerging challenges.

Create funding pipelines that prioritize BIPOC-led RSJ organizations, ensuring that those most affected by systemic inequities have the resources to lead the movement, thus impacting all women, girls, and birthing people.



Why Illinois Needs an RJ Champions Cohort

The establishment of an RJ Champions Cohort in Illinois is crucial for sustaining and advancing reproductive and sexual justice efforts across the state. As reproductive health, rights, and justice face increasing threats at the national level, Illinois stands as a beacon for reproductive freedom. However, to maintain and expand this position, it is imperative to have a well-supported, strategic network of organizations and advocates dedicated to reproductive and sexual justice.

Unlike many coalitions that focus narrowly on one dimension of reproductive and sexual justice, such as birth justice or abortion access, the RJ Champions Cohort brings together a cross-issue network of leaders and organizations whose work spans multiple, intersecting arenas. From maternal and infant health, abortion access, and contraceptive equity to housing justice, gender-based violence prevention, and immigrant rights, this Cohort reflects the breadth of challenges and opportunities that define reproductive and sexual justice in Illinois. Their collaboration is not confined to a single issue or constituency; rather, it is rooted in identifying and leveraging intersections that are both unique and innovative. This approach allows them to see linkages across communities and systems, generating solutions that are stronger, more inclusive, and more sustainable.

Because of this diversity, the RJ Champions Cohort has the potential to build a broader and more powerful base of support than single-issue networks. Its members bring with them constituencies as varied as Black birthing people, immigrant families, survivors of gender-based violence, Muslim communities, and youth of color. They are working together to ensure that reproductive and sexual justice is advanced through a wide lens that mirrors the complexity of real lives. This makeup is a deliberate embodiment of the holistic RSJ framework, which affirms that justice cannot be siloed. By aligning diverse communities and leaders under one collective vision, the Cohort is cultivating a movement infrastructure that is both deeply grounded in lived experiences and uniquely positioned to transform Illinois into a true reproductive justice sanctuary.



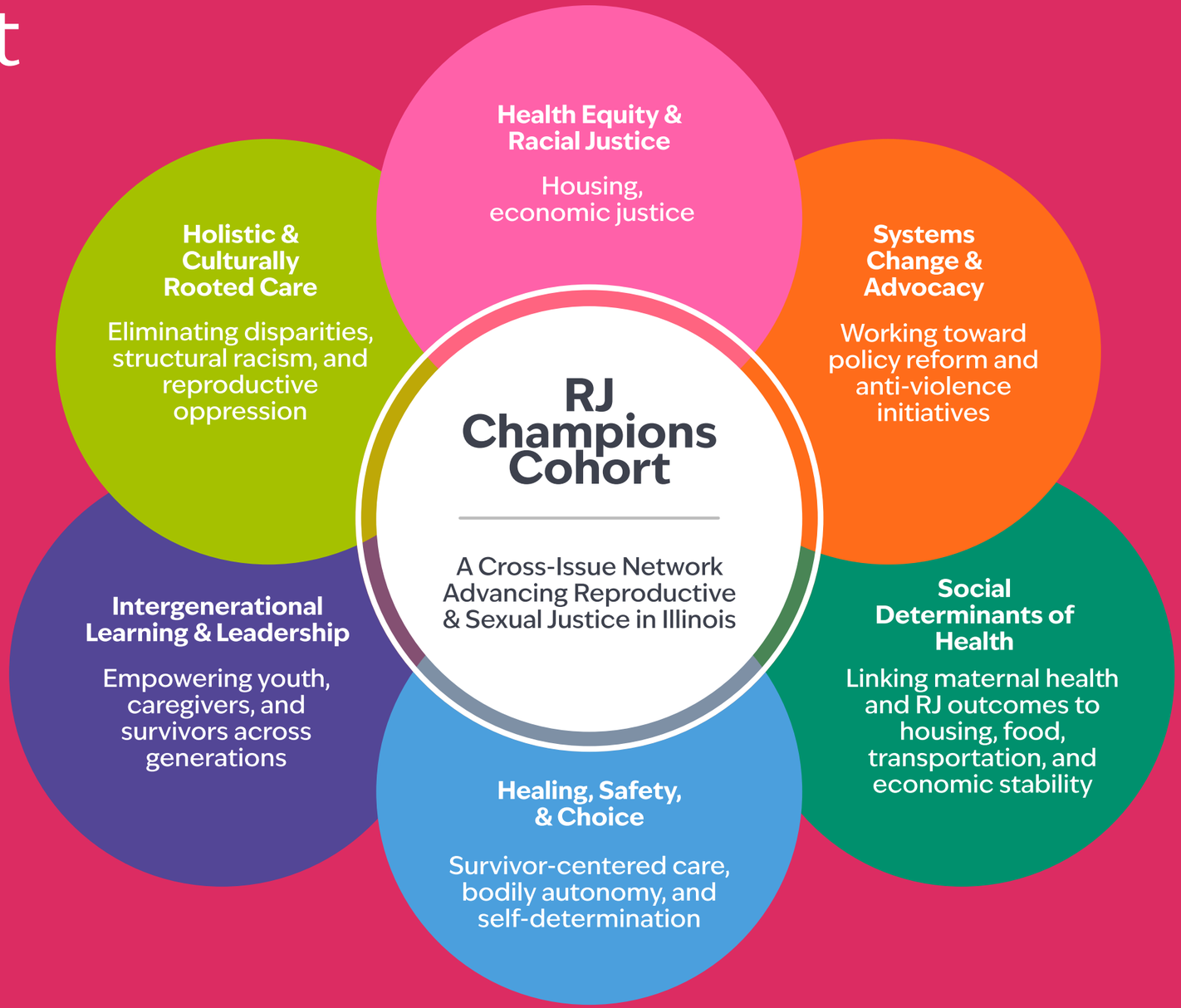
Building a Collaborative Network

Illinois has a strong history of RSJ work, yet many organizations operate in silos due to funding limitations and policy constraints. The RJ Champions Cohort:

- **Fosters collaboration among RSJ organizations,** enabling them to share resources, strategies, and expertise.
- **Creates a centralized platform for policy advocacy,** ensuring that smaller organizations have a voice in legislative discussions.
- **Encourages mentorship programs** where experienced advocates can guide emerging leaders in the movement.

Shared Commitment to Reproductive and Sexual Justice

Across all organizations, the Reproductive Justice Champions show strong alignment with the Reproductive and Sexual Justice (RSJ) framework. While each organization brings its own history, culture, and community wisdom to the work, all remain rooted in shared RSJ values. Together, the cohort advances health, dignity, and self-determination by centering people most impacted and addressing needs across the reproductive lifespan. Through care, education, advocacy, and community leadership, these organizations work to meet immediate needs while also transforming the systems that shape people's lives.



Together, the Cohort works across these interconnected systems to advance reproductive and sexual justice across Illinois.

Sustaining Grassroots Organizing

Grassroots organizing is the backbone of reproductive and sexual justice, mobilizing communities to demand change. The RJ Champions Cohort:

- **Supports grassroots organizations** with funding for community outreach, education programs, and direct services.
- **Provides training for organizers** on effective advocacy, policy engagement, and coalition-building.
- **Ensures that grassroots movements have the financial stability** to continue their work long-term.

Sustaining grassroots organizing for reproductive and sexual justice requires more than just short-term funding for programs; it demands intentional investment in the people who lead this work. Across Illinois, RSJ leaders are carrying the weight of defending and expanding rights while also navigating the emotional, political, and financial pressures that come with working in a field under constant attack. Many seasoned leaders are leaving the movement, making it urgent to both support and retain current leaders while also preparing the next generation. Philanthropic investment in leadership development and organizational sustainability ensures that leaders have the resources, mentorship, and community care they need to continue their work without burning out or being pushed out.

To ensure the movement's long-term power, the RJ Champions Cohort is committed to deepening the leadership pipeline. This includes teaching and mentoring new organizers, equipping them with the skills to navigate policy, advocacy, and community engagement, and creating conditions that make their journey into leadership less isolating and less challenging than that of previous generations. By sustaining today's leaders and cultivating tomorrow's, funders can help build a resilient infrastructure that allows grassroots organizations not only to survive but also to thrive and expand their impact. This intergenerational strategy is essential to securing reproductive and sexual justice in Illinois for decades to come.



Reflections on the Reproductive Justice Champion Leaders Cohort

BA NIA

Foremost, being a member under the guidance of Dr. Toni M. Bond has opened up doors and networking opportunities with others who share the same vision. It has also underscored the urgency to galvanize support and resources that will best serve our community, and with these added supports, we are able to be succinct in our approach and best practices. With a broader understanding afforded to us about RSJ, we are able to better articulate how the RSJ framework can be used to achieve reproductive self-determination and autonomy for all women and birthing people. To think that the RJ Champions Cohort will play a vital role in establishing an agenda for Illinois as a "safe city" is no small feat; in fact, it is remarkable. The vision of women traveling from all parts of the country safely because there is a place where their choices are respected and acknowledged is establishing a strong foundation for the RSJ community, women, and birthing people all over the country. We will and have already gained faith in knowing that this can be done in a powerful collective way.

Equal Hope

Being a member of the RJ Champions Cohort has been deeply impactful at both organizational and community levels. The collaborative space affirms Equal Hope's values, creating opportunities to partner with like-minded organizations and amplify our advocacy for underserved communities. Equal Hope has strengthened its voice in statewide and national conversations around healthcare access and reproductive justice, particularly for Black and Latine communities. The solidarity, knowledge-sharing, and collective power of the Cohort allow us to expand funding opportunities, deepen our advocacy, and sharpen our strategies to dismantle systemic inequities. This partnership not only enriches our current work but also positions Equal Hope to expand our impact, ensuring every individual has the resources and support they need to exercise their reproductive rights with dignity and autonomy.

EverThrive Illinois

In 2020, EverThrive IL adopted an updated mission, vision, and values as part of its larger strategic planning process, which makes explicit its goal of achieving reproductive justice in the healthcare ecosystem. This past year, it revised those goals to better address the needs of its post-pandemic reality and further strengthen the reproductive justice movement in Illinois.

While it had considered itself aligned with the movement for reproductive justice in the past, its strategic planning initiatives have been an important opportunity for the organization to explicitly root itself in, and be accountable to, the reproductive justice framework. It has found tremendous value in being in a community with other organizations committed to achieving reproductive justice, including some organizations it had not worked with as closely in the past. As EverThrive IL deepens its commitment to the movement, the foundational information about the reproductive justice framework has been valuable. Importantly, it is energized by the conversation about ensuring Illinois is a true sanctuary state, and it looks forward to continuing this collaborative work and turning this vision into a reality.

HEART

HEART looks forward to continued opportunities to build relationships and trust with the grantees in the Cohort and to co-create something together. HEART looks forward to the RJ Champions Cohort organizations sharing their strengths and to discussing ways we can collectively leverage those strengths to contribute to the collaborative project. Not all of us are policy organizations or have dedicated staff to this work, so it would be useful for all of us to bring our organizational strengths to the project.

HEART looks forward to learning from the other organizations in the Cohort to develop a shared analysis of the reproductive justice issues—domestically, especially in this current political climate, and globally, amongst numerous global atrocities that are intertwined with reproductive violence and oppression. Moreover, HEART looks forward to also exploring how increasingly restrictive laws are further complicating access to a myriad of care, including abortion care, fertility treatments, miscarriage management, and contraception care. HEART would like to explore the creative ways RJ Champions Cohort organizations are working to support individuals to get the critical services they need.

Healing to Action

Healing to Action's participation in the Cohort has deepened our political analysis of the challenges facing the gender-based violence and reproductive justice movements, clarifying how HTA can contribute to the movement more clearly. For instance, understanding the RJ landscape allowed HTA to target recruitment for its Survivor Power Institute 2025 cohort, opening the opportunity for RJ organizations, especially in states where reproductive rights are actively being undermined. HTA is working to create a cross-movement cohort, infusing survivor-leadership practices to support the reproductive justice movement's return to its grassroots origins in this hostile political climate. HTA has also connected with reproductive justice health organizations to provide HTA leaders workshops on reproductive health and justice issues to ensure access to services. HTA's ongoing participation will help HTA continue to offer responsive support to the movement as it works to adapt to the current political climate.

(Re)Birth Society

Joining the Cohort has been wonderful. (Re)Birth Society is so grateful to be able to learn from and organize alongside so many impactful organizations and individuals who are doing complementary work. It is inspired by the unity it feels, and it is proud to be a part of such a dynamic group. It has also begun fostering relationships and collaborations that it was introduced to through this Cohort.

(Re)Birth Society knows this is only the beginning and trusts that what it accomplished together is going to positively impact generations to come. Reflecting upon the state of RSJ in Illinois gives so much hope for the future, and it has so much to share and contribute to this cause. Last but not least, (Re)Birth Society admires the long-term relationships that CFW has with its grantees, and it sees how CFW strives to live according to its values, which seem to be ever-evolving.

Sexpectations

Being a member of the RJ Champions Cohort has allowed Sexpectations to connect with other organizations dedicated to reproductive justice who approach this work through different avenues. With its curriculum being implemented in a few partner sites, it is encouraged to connect with other Cohort members to collaborate on youth programming and learn more about how its lessons can address additional important issues and themes in this work. Being at the Reproductive Justice Retreat, Sexpectations was able to gain insight into the driving issues and values of other organizations and expand its knowledge of Chicagoland resources. With an increased inventory of local resources, it is better able to respond to participant needs and offer resources it knows are youth-centered and trauma-informed.

In the coming year, Sexpectations is eager to share the impact of comprehensive and inclusive sex education with the Cohort and hopes that its work can drive policy goals. Compared to its neighboring states, Illinois has more expansive and accessible resources for minors. However, it knows that there is room for growth to make reproductive healthcare for young people more equitable and diverse. The Cohort has empowered Sexpectations in the need for sex education in the communities, and it is excited to learn from other longstanding organizations on how it can ensure the sustainability of its programming and continued impact.





A Call to Illinois Legislators

Illinois legislators are called upon to recognize the RJ Champions Cohort as content experts in reproductive justice and to prioritize and invest in these organizations to safeguard the health, rights, and autonomy of Illinois residents in a time of unprecedented threats to reproductive and sexual justice. Failing to act puts constituents, especially those from marginalized communities, at heightened risk of preventable deaths, lack of bodily autonomy, and impairment of fundamental rights.

The Urgency: Why Policy Action Is Critical

Illinois stands as a sanctuary for reproductive rights while neighboring states impose dangerous restrictions and burdens on access to care. Yet attacks and inequities persist, disproportionately harming BIPOC people, low-income families, immigrants, LGBTQIA+ communities, and youth. Without strong legislative commitment, Illinois families face rising maternal mortality rates, higher cancer-related deaths, gaps in postpartum care, and worsening disparities in reproductive health and rights.

The Expertise and Impact of the Cohort

The RJ Champions Cohort includes organizations with unique, complementary strengths:

BA NIA Incorporated: Delivers holistic, culturally-relevant maternal healthcare and doula services to address racial disparities and empower women and birthing people.

Equal Hope: Expands access and advocates for free preventive screenings and patient navigation and addresses the social determinants of health to support underserved communities seeking reproductive cancer prevention and access to healthcare.

EverThrive Illinois: Convenes community-driven advocacy, ensuring equitable perinatal care, contraceptive justice, and support for parents of color.

Healing to Action: Pioneers survivor-led responses to gender-based violence, linking trauma-informed peer networks with policy organizing.

HEART Women & Girls: Mobilizes Muslim communities nationwide with culturally competent sexual and reproductive health education, advocacy, and support for survivors of gendered violence.

(Re)Birth Society: Focuses on African Diaspora and Indigenous communities, providing targeted direct care, doula support, and education rooted in restorative justice and environmental stewardship.

Sexpectations Chicago: Empowers youth of color with inclusive, affirming sexual health education and advocacy to foster safe, informed communities.

The Moral and Strategic Imperative

Prioritizing and uplifting the RJ Champions Cohort is not just a matter of policy; it is a moral imperative. By partnering strategically and boldly with RSJ organizations, legislators can make Illinois a national model for reproductive and sexual justice, protecting lives and honoring the dignity and autonomy of every resident.



“The time to act is now. Stand with content experts; invest in justice-driven organizations; pass legislation that protects and uplifts all Illinoisans because reproductive justice is a cornerstone of thriving, equitable communities.”

— The Reproductive Justice Champions

Policy Recommendations for Illinois as a Reproductive Justice Sanctuary

Expanding Medicaid Coverage for Reproductive Healthcare

- **Ensure full Medicaid reimbursement for doula and midwifery services** to improve maternal health outcomes.
- **Extend postpartum Medicaid coverage beyond 12 months**, ensuring continuous and uninterrupted care for birthing individuals.
- **Increase funding for abortion care under Medicaid**, particularly for those traveling from restrictive states.

Strengthening Protections Against Reproductive and Sexual Coercion and Discrimination

- **Implement comprehensive legal protections against reproductive and sexual coercion**, including workplace discrimination related to pregnancy and reproductive and sexual health choices.
- **Strengthen anti-discrimination laws** to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals and ensure access to inclusive reproductive and sexual healthcare services.
- **Increase penalties for healthcare institutions that deny reproductive and sexual health services** based on religious exemptions.

Ensuring Access to Abortion Care for Out-of-State Residents

- **Establish additional transportation and lodging support** for individuals traveling from out of state for abortion care.
- **Expand funding for clinics providing abortion services**, ensuring they have the capacity to meet increased demand.
- **Strengthen privacy protections for patients** traveling from states with restrictive abortion laws to prevent legal retaliation.

Comprehensive Reproductive and Sexual Healthcare Education

- **Mandate comprehensive, medically accurate, and culturally competent reproductive and sexual education** in all Illinois public schools.
- **Provide reproductive and sexual healthcare education tailored to diverse populations**, including BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and immigrant communities.
- **Expand state funding for public education campaigns** about reproductive and sexual health and available healthcare services.

Increasing Funding for Grassroots RSJ Organizations

- **Allocate state grants to grassroots organizations** working in reproductive and sexual healthcare advocacy, maternal health, and abortion access.
- **Provide multi-year, unrestricted funding** to organizations led by and serving historically marginalized communities.
- **Support leadership development initiatives** for advocates and healthcare providers in the RSJ field.

Expanding Safe and Accessible Birthing Options

- **Increase the number of freestanding birthing centers throughout Illinois**, particularly in underserved rural and urban communities.
- **Strengthen hospital accountability for maternal health disparities** by implementing mandatory reporting on racial health inequities.
- **Provide financial incentives for medical institutions** that train and hire diverse midwives and doulas.

Protecting and Expanding RSJ Legislation

- **Codify abortion rights into the Illinois Constitution** to safeguard against potential federal rollbacks.



- **Expand protections for healthcare providers** offering reproductive and sexual healthcare services to prevent harassment and legal threats.
- **Strengthen legal protections for RSJ activists and organizations** working on the frontlines of advocacy.

By adopting these comprehensive policy recommendations, Illinois can further establish itself as a sanctuary for reproductive and sexual justice, ensuring that all individuals have the right to access safe, equitable, and comprehensive reproductive and sexual healthcare services.

Strengthening Grassroots Organizing for Reproductive and Sexual Justice

To effectively strengthen grassroots organizing for reproductive and sexual justice, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. This includes robust coalition-building efforts that connect RSJ organizations with broader social justice movements, ensuring that issues such as racial equity, economic justice, and immigrant rights are integrated into advocacy efforts.

Coalition-Building Strategies

- **Establish statewide alliances among RSJ organizations, healthcare providers, and legal advocacy groups** to form a unified front in legislative battles and public education campaigns.
- **Develop cross-sector partnerships with labor unions, housing rights organizations, and environmental justice groups** to address the intersectionality of RSJ issues.
- **Create a centralized platform or network** that allows organizations to share resources, coordinate advocacy efforts, and collectively respond to policy threats.

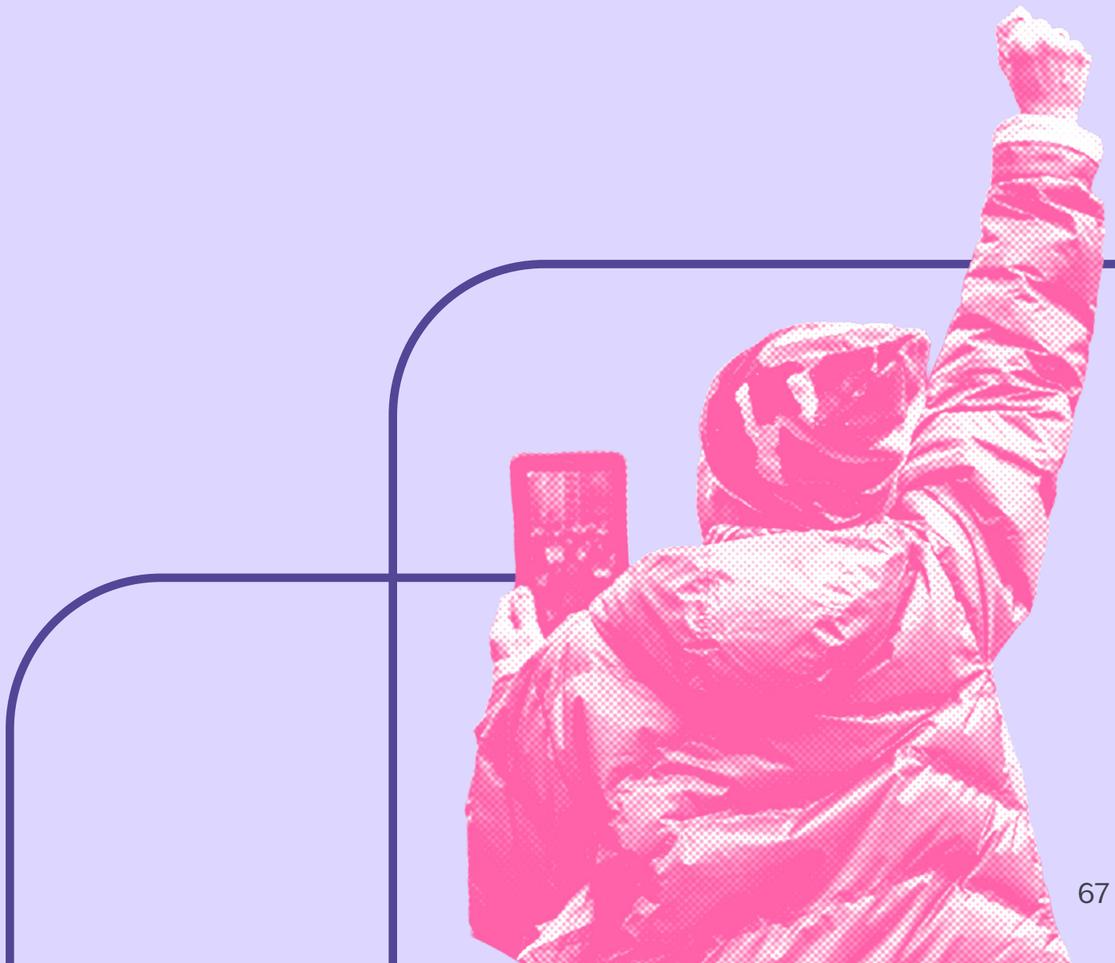
Enhancing Community Engagement

- **Implement peer education programs** that empower individuals from marginalized communities to become advocates for RSJ within their own networks.
- **Expand access to community-based workshops and forums** that provide education on reproductive health, rights, justice, and legal protections.
- **Leverage digital storytelling and social media campaigns** to amplify the lived experiences of those impacted by reproductive and sexual health disparities and policy restrictions.

Strengthening Policy Advocacy

- **Train grassroots activists in policy advocacy techniques**, including lobbying, public testimony, and campaign strategy development.
- **Develop local policy councils** that engage directly with legislators to push for comprehensive RSJ policies.
- **Mobilize community members to participate in state and national advocacy days**, ensuring that reproductive and sexual justice remains a priority in legislative discussions.

By implementing these strategies, Illinois can foster a powerful grassroots movement that not only protects reproductive and sexual health and rights but also advances a broader vision of justice and equity for all communities.



Conclusion

Illinois has the opportunity to serve as a national model for reproductive and sexual justice. However, to achieve this vision, a multi-faceted approach is necessary, combining policy reform, community-driven initiatives, and sustained financial support from philanthropic organizations and individual donors. By enacting robust legislative protections, Illinois can establish itself as a safe haven for individuals seeking reproductive and sexual healthcare that is under threat elsewhere in the country.

Additionally, investing in grassroots organizations ensures that those most affected by reproductive and sexual injustices have the resources to lead their own advocacy and support efforts. Expanding educational outreach, increasing access to reproductive and sexual healthcare services,

and prioritizing equity-driven policy reforms will strengthen Illinois's position as a leader in RSJ.

Illinois must also engage in broader coalition-building efforts, working in tandem with national organizations to protect reproductive and sexual health, rights, and justice on a larger scale. This requires not only legal protections but also a cultural shift that fosters widespread understanding and support for RSJ.

By committing to these steps, Illinois can set a national precedent, proving that comprehensive, intersectional, and justice-driven approaches to reproductive and sexual healthcare are both achievable and necessary for an equitable future.



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