

Russell Squire
Chair

Will Brightbill
District Manager



505 Park Avenue, Suite 620
New York, N.Y. 10022-1106
(212) 758-4340
(212) 758-4616 (Fax)
www.cb8m.com – Website
info@cb8m.com – E-Mail

**The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Joint meeting of the Women & Families Committee and the Voting Reform Task Force
Tuesday, September 20, 2022 at 6:30 pm**

MINUTES

CB8M Members in Attendance: Elizabeth Ashby, Lori Bores, Alida Camp, Saundra Coleman, Rebecca Dangoor, Ed Hartzog, Sahar Husain, Valerie Mason, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Russell Squire, Shari Weiner.

Public member in attendance: Susan Evans.

Resolutions for Approval:

Item 1: Affirming Women’s Right to Access Reproductive Care Approval (Unanimous)

1. Protecting Reproductive and Other Rights

With abortion and other rights under increasing threat, CB8’s Women & Families Committee and the Voting Reform Task Force explored ways to protect our rights, including through the ballot box.

The Voting Reform Task Force also provided an update on plans for redistricting the New York City Council.

Tuesday night’s speakers included State Assembly Member Rebecca Seawright; Dr. Marlene Fried, professor emerita of philosophy at Hampshire College and a national expert on reproductive rights; and, Sharon Weiner, co-chair of the Voting Reform Task Force.

Speakers capsulized the risks to women’s and others’ rights and described ways to combat the mounting threat.

AM Seawright presented an overview of the proposed Equality Act in New York State. The act would create an amendment to the state’s constitution that would ban discrimination in a wide range of areas, including abortion. Specifically, the act (S.51002 and A. 41002) would prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, disability, creed, religion, or sex, including sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, reproductive health care and autonomy.

Ms. Seawright stated that the bill is needed in New York State to protect individuals’ reproductive and other rights. Indeed, in today’s political climate she said that “we can expect further attacks on the LGBTQ” community, as well as on “transgender children, contraception and more.”

She said the Equality Act is needed in New York State to protect individuals’ rights. So far, that legislative proposal has passed the first of its three hurdles: For inclusion in the state’s constitution, the amendment must be approved in two successive sessions of the state’s legislature before going before voters in a referendum.

Having passed overwhelmingly in the state's legislature in July, the bill will be addressed again in the legislature's next session, starting in January. She says she will be "leading the fight" for passage of the bill and expects the legislature will pass it again—although she foresees "strong" opposition to it "from the religious right." She says she will be seeking support, not only among legislative colleagues but also among the state's law schools and other groups.

Dr. Marlene Fried, professor emerita at Hampshire College, described the extent of the threat to a woman's right to choose: Currently, she said, some 24 million women live in states with abortion bans. Eventually, "it's likely that half the women in the country" will be in the same situation," she said. Moreover, surveillance of doctors in anti-abortion states is extensive, she said, and "in many of these states, doctors face a loss of their medical license" if they terminate a pregnancy.

And the situation is worsening, said Dr. Fried. Overall, "the goal of the anti-choice movement "is to make abortion unavailable to everyone," she said. Among the steps in that direction: the possibility that the Supreme Court could declare a fetus to be a person. "The fact that the Court's Dobbs mentions 'unborn persons' many times opens the door to that possibility," she said. If so, it would mean that a fetus would have more rights than a pregnant woman.

However, on the brighter side, abortion access has become high on the agenda for many voters. And beyond voting in November, other ways to support reproductive rights include: backing legislation in "blue states," such as New York, that aims to codify reproductive rights, and tying abortion rights to other pressing issues, such as voting rights, civil rights, generally, and aid to the poor. As Dr. Fried pointed out, 75% of those seeking an abortion have incomes near or below the poverty line. Linking issues of autonomy—including reproductive rights-- and civil rights builds a stronger case for supporting all these issues. Overall, "we need to build understanding that reproductive justice is not separate from other rights."

On a more individual level, she said that spreading information about abortion pills would help women living in states that ban or limit abortion.

As a third speaker, Shari Weiner described the activities of the Brigid Alliance, a referral-based service that provides travel, lodging, childcare and other logistical support for people seeking an abortion. As she pointed out, this support is essential to women in abortion-banning states needing to travel long distances for abortion services. Each month, Brigid Alliance helps at least 125 clients at an average cost of \$1,250 per person. Donations to support the work of Brigid Alliance can be made through its website, www.brigidalliance.org.

Ms. Weiner, co-chair of CB8's Voting Reform Task Force, also stressed the importance of voting to support women's reproductive rights. As she pointed out, "We have to have elected officials who support a women's access to abortions at the federal and state levels to ensure that abortions and other reproductive health services are available to all women."

While New York State protects a women's right to choose, a number of other state legislatures are placing restrictions on access to abortions. Two ways New Yorkers can help, locally and nationally: sending postcards to encourage people to vote; and, participating in phone banking to support a particular pro-choice candidate. To participate in postcard-sending opportunities, visit www.turnoutpac.org/postcards. For phone banking, visit www.sisterdistrict.com.

In addition, during the Q&A session, CB8 member Ed Hartzog reported that anyone wishing to participate in phone banking or campaigning “on the ground” could contact the New York Democratic Lawyers’ Council or the New York Republican Lawyers’ Council.

Following the Q&A session, the committees unanimously passed a resolution in support both of reproductive rights, and the state’s proposed Equality Act, with the following resolution:

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS the Supreme Court’s recent landmark ruling in the case of Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization undermined the right of women to obtain an abortion, marking the first time in America that a broad privacy right was removed by judicial decision; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court’s overturning of the right to an abortion prompted a growing number of states to enact legislation to limit or ban the termination of a pregnancy and, in some cases, to punish those who provide an abortion; and

WHEREAS such restrictions on reproductive rights can create significant financial hardships, and potentially, health-threatening risks for women wishing to end a pregnancy in states that prohibit abortion; and

WHEREAS the New York State Legislature is addressing this infringement on women’s and others’ rights, through its proposed Equality Act (S.51002 and A.41002). This proposal would create an amendment to the state’s constitution barring discrimination, as the proposal states, “because of race, color ethnicity, national origin, gender expression, pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, and reproductive healthcare and autonomy,” therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that Community Board 8, Manhattan affirms women’s right to access the reproductive options and care of their choice. CB8 further supports passage of the Equality Act in New York State, which would create an amendment to the state’s constitution that bans discrimination on the basis of race, color ethnicity, national origin, gender expression, pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, and reproductive healthcare and autonomy.

VOTE: 12-0-0

In favor: Elizabeth Ashby, Lori Bores, Alida Camp, Saundra Coleman, Rebecca Dangoor, Ed Hartzog, Sahar Husain, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Russell Squire, Shari Weiner.

Public member in favor: Susan Evans.

(Below please find the full language of the proposed New York State Equality Act.)

2. Update on Plans for Redistricting the New York City Council

Shari Weiner gave an update on plans for redistricting of the New York City Council. As she explained, every 10 years following the census, the city council’s district lines must be adjusted. This process is undertaken by NYC Districting Commission, a 15-member body appointed by the Mayor and City Council.

Of particular importance to CB8 are Council Districts 4 and 5.

Recently, the Commission released a proposed Redistricting map, which moved portions of the Upper East Side, Sutton Place and Roosevelt Island to Queens City Council District 26.

At a public hearing August 22, many residents of the Upper East Side, Sutton Place and Roosevelt Island testified in opposition to the proposed map.

Update since the September 20 W&F and VRTF committees' meeting: On Sept 22, the New York City Districting Commission voted down the revised City Council districting maps that took into account public comments. As a result of the vote, the Commission said it would hold a public meeting to deliberate on district lines. Once the Commission approves the maps, they will be sent to the City Council for a vote. Although the City Council can accept, reject or modify the Redistricting map, the decision on the final district lines rests with the Districting Commission.

The proposed New York State Equality Act

July 1, 2022

a) That article 1 of the constitution be amended to read as follows:
No person shall be denied the equal protection of the laws of this state or any subdivision thereof. No person shall, because of race, color, **ethnicity, national origin, age, disability**, creed [or], religion, or sex, **including sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, and reproductive healthcare and autonomy**, be subjected to any discrimination in [his or her] **their** civil rights by any other person or by any firm, corporation, or institution, or by the state or any agency or subdivision of the state, **pursuant to law**.

b. Nothing in this section shall invalidate or prevent the adoption of any law, regulation, program, or practice that is designed to prevent or dismantle discrimination on the basis of a characteristic listed in this section, nor shall any characteristic listed in this section be interpreted to interfere with, limit, or deny the civil rights of any person based upon any other characteristic identified in this section.

Resolved That the foregoing amendment be referred to the first regular legislative session convening after the next succeeding general election of members of the assembly, and, in conformity with section 1 of article of the constitution, be published for 3 months previous to the time of such election.

EXPLANATION--Matter in **italics** (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [] is old law to be omitted.

Gayle Baron and Margaret Price, Co-Chairs, Women & Families Committee