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SisterSong OPPOSES HB 1155 The Sex and Race Selection Bill

SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, in partnership with SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW!; SisterLove, Inc.; Planned Parenthood of Georgia; and Feminist Women's Health Center, OPPOSES House Bill 1155. This misleading issue of abortions for sex- and race-selection in Georgia means that we have to use facts and science to stand up for women of color without undermining our support for abortion rights or without enforcing racial stereotypes about women of color.

HB 1155 will prohibit women of color from accessing an abortion of their own volition. The false assumption that abortion providers throughout the state "solicit" women of color is unfounded and inflammatory. We recognize that the lived experiences of women of color, and Black women specifically, drive how and when women choose abortion, not abortion providers who defend women's rights. In order to protect the lives of women and families, abortion must remain safe, legal, affordable, and accessible.

HB 1155 prohibits sex-selection abortions. While sex and gender discrimination are widespread societal problems, the women of Georgia would be greatly harmed by such a ban. This aspect of the bill, like the aspects dealing with race, would greatly burden providers, forcing them to question every woman seeking a legal abortion to try to determine the "true" reason for the abortion -- a scenario that would tremendously inhibit abortion access. Sex selection is a symptom of deeply rooted social norms, biased stereotypes, and inequality. HB 1155 does nothing to address the root causes of this issue, gender inequality and stereotyping.

HB 1155 is an assault on abortion providers. This bill was created under the false assumption that abortion doctors target and solicit women of color, particularly Black women, to have abortions. The assertion that abortion providers position themselves in Black community is NOT TRUE. Of the 15 providers that provide abortions services in the state of Georgia, only four are located in predominantly Black (50% or more) neighborhoods.

HB 1155 will delay medical services for women, particularly women of color in Georgia. Implementation of this bill will provide another roadblock to women seeking abortion. Doctors will have an additional burden, beyond the current law, of proving they are not attempting to "solicit". This could mean invasive questioning of women and massive amounts of paperwork which could further delay their access to services.

HB 1155 seeks to classify abortion providers as "organized crime" by rewriting the racketeering laws. Title 16 of the Official Code of Georgia was created with the intention of prosecuting sustained illegal activity or systematic abuse. Abortion is LEGAL in the state of Georgia and the alleged abuse of this medical procedure is unfounded.

HB 1155 will increase medical malpractice costs. The revision of the tort law will open abortion doctors up to lawsuits for the "criminally aborted". This will increase the cost of malpractice insurance, further limiting the availability of reproductive health services in the state. Communities of color will be disproportionately affected.

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THE REALITY ABOUT ABORTION IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

1) In Georgia, 17% of pregnancies end in abortion. Of that percentage, 54.5% are African American women. The high rates of abortions in Georgia reflect the reality of lack of human rights protections that exist for Black women in Georgia. The lack of access to services, lack of contraception, sexual violence within the community, lack of comprehensive sex education, and lack of pregnancy prevention programs increasingly impact reproductive health outcomes for women of color in general, and Black women in particular.

Did you know?

*Black women make up 27% of people/families living in poverty.
Black women make up 34% of the uninsured in Georgia.*

2) Georgia's high abortion rate is a reflection of limited abortion services in the Southern Region. As access to abortion is rolled back in neighboring states like Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama with large African American populations, Georgia by comparison has more accessibility to such services. According to the Guttmacher Institute, Georgia's abortion data is made up of BOTH residents and women from other states, so our abortions rate is not actually a reflection of our residents. And while Atlanta offers the best abortion access in the Deep South, we still lag behind other regions in guaranteeing abortion access for women.

Did you know?

*In the South census region, where Georgia is located, 21% of women having abortions traveled at least 50 miles, and 10% traveled more than 100 miles.¹
Mississippi has only one clinic that is opened twice a week.*

3) The decrease in the African American population in GA cannot be directly correlated with abortion rates. Since slavery, Black women have consistently associated controlling our fertility with social uplift. The more educated Black women become, the fewer children we have, as with all racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, disregarding deaths related to medical causes (i.e. HIV, heart disease, diabetes) or reductions due to migration patterns is flawed thinking.

4) Providers are not prevalent in Black communities. Of the 15 providers that operate in GA only four are in predominantly Black (50% or more) neighborhoods.

5) Comparing abortion rates to the Jewish Holocaust is anti-Semitic. This argument diminishes the Holocaust where six million Jews suffered human rights violations, and were ultimately killed. Furthering this logic equates Black women to Nazis and predators of our families and children. There is a difference between a woman controlling her own fertility and state-ordered population control. It is unacceptable.

6) We believe in every woman's human right to HAVE children, NOT HAVE children, and PARENT the children she does have. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and its civil rights provision, is not applicable to the unborn because you have to be born to claim human rights. However, the U.N. documents regarding women do guarantee the rights of women to control our own bodies and reproduction, including abortion.

¹ Guttmacher Institute <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/sfaa/georgia.html>