



Colleagues, friends, and fellow social workers:

Yesterday, many of you watched the evening news coming from Alabama, where Governor Kay Ivey signed the controversial Alabama Human Life Protection Act, which outlaws almost all abortions in the state, only a short 24 hours after the state Senate voted to send it to her desk. For many, this legislation might feel deeply personal and challenging. I have already heard from many of you—sharing a range of emotions from anger to confliction to grief. I understand, and I share many of these same emotions.

One of the greatest strengths of our profession is our deep commitment to a client-centered stance; to respect where our clients are and use that as a starting point to support their right to determine their own future. That perspective is the foundation of our work with individuals, groups, and in agencies, and is how we empower communities. It is the core of who we are—and who we committed to be professionally when we embarked on our social work journey. We are still human, however. Each of us brings our own set of personal beliefs, values, experiences, and ideas to the dialogue. Inevitably, for some—if not all of us—we will encounter issues and situations where our personal and professional beliefs are challenged and perhaps may contradict one another. The topic of reproductive rights is one such area. As such, the new law in Alabama stirs a wide array of personal and professional reactions in each of us. Collectively, our greatest professional strength—to be client- and person-centered—can also be one of the greatest individual challenges we face. I want each of you to know that whatever your feelings are on this issue, they are valid and understood—and you have colleagues within the NASW-NJ community who are struggling with the same, I assure you.

The NASW Code of Ethics states that “social workers respect and promote the rights of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals.” Self-determination as it relates to reproductive health means individuals should be able to make their own decisions about sexual activity and reproduction, without government interference or reproductive coercion by an intimate partner, friend, family member, or professional. As social workers, we support the right of individuals to decide for themselves—without duress, and according to their own personal beliefs and convictions—when and if they choose to become parents. All social work services, including those services related to abortion, adoption, contraception, and parenting, should be provided safely and competently, in a nonjudgmental manner, based on evidence-based practice and the needs of the client, rather than on the personal beliefs of another individual.

As such, the **National Association of Social Workers-New Jersey Chapter stands with women, and our clients, in vehement opposition to the Alabama legislation.** Our Chapter will stand in solidarity with others to uphold the values and ethics of the social work profession and to continue to:

- Oppose the repeal of Roe v. Wade
- Repeal other restrictions on public and private insurance coverage of abortions
- Resist any restrictions to abortion access that do not meet the Supreme Court's *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt* decision, unless such restrictions offer evidence-based medical or safety benefits sufficient to justify any burdens
- Oppose all efforts to deny federal and state funds, including Medicaid reimbursements, to Planned Parenthood and other providers associated with abortion.

We will continue to work with legislators in New Jersey to ensure our representatives understand the dire impact legislative actions, such as those taken in Alabama, have on women—and on our community as a whole. We are STRONGER when we uphold the values of our profession and support the right of all individuals to self-determination.

As social workers, we are called to use our voices to advocate on behalf of those whose rights are being deteriorated. Our Chapter will meet that call to action.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Thompson, MSW". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Thompson, MSW
Executive Director
NASW-NJ