

Michigan Religious Coalition For Reproductive Choice

MI-RCRC

Fall 2006

Reasons for Optimism

FDA Approves Over-the Counter

After years of foot-dragging, the FDA has granted over-the-counter (OTC) status to EC, emergency contraception, for women 18 and older. This victory results from years of pressure from the scientific and medical communities as well as pro-choice activists.

Unfortunately, there are two gray clouds still hanging over the heads of us who are adamant in our insistence on access to comprehensive reproductive health care for **all** women. One cloud is the “women over 18” condition. We know that teen-pregnancy is a serious problem in our country. And this decision still denies access to a high percentage of women most in need of such coverage. I Rebekah Warren, Executive Director of MARAL Pro-Choice Michigan said: “While there is still much public debate on the issue of women’s constitutionally protected right to choose a safe and legal abortion without government interference, we should all agree on one fundamental point: preventing unintended pregnancies should be our top priority.”

A second gray cloud here in Michigan is **House Bill 5311** introduced in October, 2005 which would prevent EC from receiving OTC status in Michigan, even if FDA grants OTC status. That day has now come. So, this battle is not over. Stay tuned to find out what you can do to be sure such legislation is **never** passed.

Civil Rights Commission Supports Contraceptive Equity

In other **good** news, here in Michigan, in August the Civil Rights Commission issued a Declaratory Ruling that an employer’s exclusion of contraceptives from a health plan that covers other prescription drugs and services constitutes discrimination against women. This battle likewise is not over. The next step is to pass actual Contraceptive Equity **legislation**. We’ll be keeping you informed how you can help meet this challenge!

Michigan Citizens for Life Fail

Pro-choice supporters in Michigan won another important victory on July 10, 2006. That was the deadline for Michigan Citizens for Life to turn in the required number of valid signatures to place a definition of personhood constitutional amendment on the November 7, 2006 ballot. They failed to meet this requirement, so their proposed change to the Michigan Constitution will **not** go before voters this fall. This initiative would have granted full personhood and the corresponding rights of personhood **at conception**. Even Right to Life of Michigan and The Michigan Catholic Conference spoke out publicly in opposition to this extreme initiative.

Keep Close Watch: Moderate Approach to Abortion

In late September, Tim Ryan of Ohio, a member of the congressional pro-life caucus, and Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, a member of the pro-choice caucus, introduced the “Reducing the Need for Abortion and Supporting Parents Act,” in an attempt to offer a moderate platform on the subject of abortion. Polls make it increasingly apparent that most Americans prefer a moderate approach to pregnancy prevention that protects women’s ability to make decisions about abortion while also increasing the availability of contraception.

Religious institutions that are members of RCRC have continuously voiced this moderate, compassionate approach, supporting women as those who are ultimately responsible for a decision about abortion and encouraging society to provide education and resources to women of all ages and income levels before a crisis pregnancy occurs. Several items in the Ryan-DeLauro legislation are consistent with this approach: expanding pre-natal care, expanding income eligibility for contraceptive services, and expanding funding for family planning clinics. While this bill, in its present form, doesn’t include all that we would like it to, we are hopeful that additional features will be added to a comprehensive, omnibus bill in the next Congress. (Incidentally, Rosa DeLauro is the Congressman who spearheaded the “Catholic Statement of Principles,” signed by 55 Catholic democrats last Spring, making clear their commitment to the basic principles at the heart of Catholic social teaching: helping the poor and disadvantaged and protecting the most vulnerable among us.)

RCRC Challenges Federal Abortion Ban

In September, RCRC filed a brief with the U. S. Supreme Court in *Gonzales v. Carhart*, challenging, **on religious grounds**, the federal abortion ban and urging the Court to strike it

down. *Gonzales v. Carhart* will review the constitutionality of the “Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003,” which was signed into law by President Bush just three years after the Supreme Court struck down a similar Nebraska

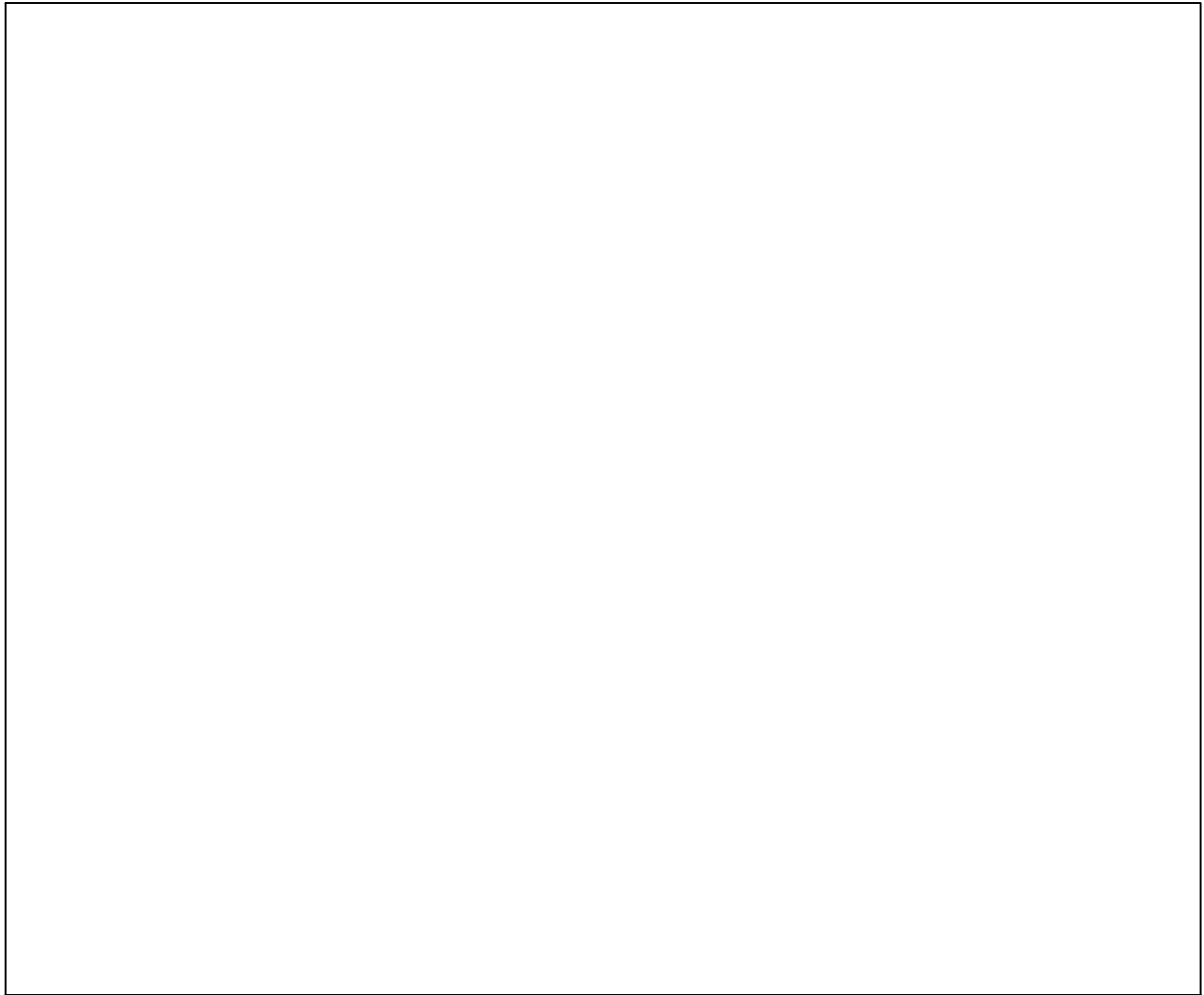
ban as unconstitutional. The Bush Administration brought the current case to the Court after federal appeals courts in New York, Nebraska, and California declared the ban unconstitutional.

Although opponents of legal abortion claim that the law before the Court would ban only the one procedure that they call “partial-birth abortion,” the law actually would ban several procedures used early in pregnancy. The brief submitted by RCRC informs the Court that many **religions** oppose such restrictions on legal abortion. Rev. Carlton W. Veazey, President of RCRC, says: “The Court’s decision in this case will have enormous consequences for every woman in this country, and for the men and children who love and depend on them.”

More Work Ahead

As the above articles demonstrate, while there have been some important victories, there is **much** work to be done. Fortunately, we can count on our **MSU Medical Students for Choice** as well as a vibrant **Under-Grads for Choice** group. Medical students Cheryl Peavler and Debra Smouse attended the Med Students for Choice leadership training conference in Raleigh, NC in August and have returned full of ideas, stories, and **energy**.

Also brimming with enthusiasm are undergrads Brian Weeks and Kirby Metty, who attended the Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom conference in D.C. this summer. They are energized by both the spirit and the content of the conference. They were particularly excited about 1) the “Real Education for Adult Life” Bill, a comprehensive sexuality education funding bill, and 2) their participation in a session of goal-setting recommendations for the Methodist Conference.



Get out and Vote November 7th!

Or, get your absentee ballot in!

Vote for candidates who will:

- support a woman's **right and responsibility** to choose wisely, faced with an unintended pregnancy;
- support legislation which will help women **prevent unintended pregnancies**;
- support funding for services and resources to women and children so that **every child born can be both wanted and cared for.**

Check the websites of the following organizations which will list the candidates who are progressive and broadly pro-choice:

Michigan Planned Parenthood at
<http://miplannedparenthood.org>

MARAL Pro-Choice Michigan at
<http://prochoicemichigan.org>

Vote to retain Jennifer Granholm as Governor of Michigan. She has a proven track record in support of all women and children, especially those most vulnerable!!

Coming Event

The MSU Medical Students for Choice will present their Fall kick-off event on Wednesday, October 18th at 6pm on campus in E202 Fee Hall. The featured speaker will be Renee Chelian, Director of Northland Family Planning Centers. She will present her very own personal pre-Roe v. Wade story.

Dinner will be provided by us (MI-RCRC)! Come one, come all!!

Special Thanks

...to long-time MI-RCRC member **Peggy Garver** who hosted our annual August picnic/swim event. We've checked the old Minutes, and it appears she has been hosting this annual event since at least 1986. WOW!!

For many years, our Steering Committee has been meeting at 5pm. We're trying something new: we're meeting at **NOON** instead---the 2nd Monday of each month. So, bring a brown-bag lunch and join us at All Saints Episcopal Church (in the library), 800 Abbott Rd., East Lansing. Find out how you can get involved. Next meetings: October 9th, November 13th and December 11th. We hope you'll join us!

Comments/suggestions always welcome:

MI-RCRC Chairman
Rev. Bob Frederick 

New Meeting Time for MI-RCRC