



FEMINIST MAJORITY FOUNDATION

CHOICES CAMPUS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

WORLD'S LARGEST PRO-CHOICE STUDENT NETWORK

STATE CAPITALS CAMPAIGN

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THE IMPORTANCE OF STATE ACTIONS

Gains and losses for women's rights are occurring increasingly at the state policy or legislative level. Many restrictive policies and legislation and too little progressive measures are emanating from state legislatures and from Governors' mansions. From access to abortion and family planning to voting rights, economic equality, DREAM acts, and LGBT rights, the actions of state lawmakers are critically impacting social justice and human rights issues.

We've taken to the streets - now it's time to take to the halls of the state capitols. Elected officials often underestimate the power of determined students. For example, the state legislature in Virginia was considering a bill that would require every woman seeking an abortion to undergo an invasive transvaginal ultrasound. Women, including many students, rallied against the measure, and after a protest of over 1,000 women and men lining the sidewalk to the state capitol, the Governor removed the dangerous provision from legislative consideration.

Legislative state attacks are aimed at more than abortion access. Family planning, collective bargaining, educational opportunity, immigration reform, and civil and human rights are areas that anti-woman policymakers have set in their sights. We must act!

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Attacks are occurring on a wide range of issues affecting women. Here are just some of the attempts to roll back women's rights we've seen so far.

ABORTION AND FAMILY PLANNING

State legislatures have passed laws, and Governors have signed laws into measure, slashing family planning funding, banning abortion at 6, 12, and 20 weeks, and putting TRAP (Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers) laws in place aimed at closing clinics.

CIVIL RIGHTS, LGBT, AND IMMIGRATION RIGHTS

Many states have enacted voter suppression laws in an attempt to prevent students, people of color, women, and low-income individuals from voting. These laws limit the number of early voting days, make it harder to vote by absentee ballot, and also require specific photo IDs at the polls in order to vote at all. State legislatures have also been key in banning same-sex marriage and adoption rights. Both anti-immigration laws and positive reforms such as DREAM acts are being introduced and passed.

ECONOMIC EQUITY AND WORKERS' RIGHTS

In 2011, Wisconsin made national headlines with an anti-union law aimed at predominantly female professions, e.g. teachers, social workers, and nurses. Since then, worker's rights and collective bargaining have been under repeated attack. Some bills passed by state legislatures aim at exempting predominantly male unions, such as firefighters and police, from the negative impacts of the laws while leaving predominantly female unions like teachers vulnerable.

EDUCATION

Legislatures are slashing funding for higher education and state universities and colleges. The Ryan Budget introduced and passed in the US House doubled interest rates on student loans and cuts funds for Pell Grants.

STATE CAPITALS CAMPAIGN

Students are needed in the state capitols to defend women's rights and a whole host of social justice issues. Feminist Majority Foundation groups and affiliates can help by organizing a feminist student presence in state capitols. Mobilizing a feminist student force to counter legislative attacks on women is essential. By speaking to your state representatives and senators, raising awareness, and organizing events, you can stop these attacks.



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GETTING STARTED

STEP 1: Form a “Capital Watch” team that tracks important legislation and updates your feminist group about what is happening. Whenever it is possible, read the actual text of the legislation. Obtain legislative position papers of allies.

Step 2: Join coalitions with other reproductive health groups and progressive groups and organizations to expand your presence. Provide a strong feminist student presence in coalitions fighting for our rights. By working with other groups and organizations, we become a stronger force. If there are decision-making tables for reproductive rights coalitions, be sure you attend and provide a strong feminist student presence. There are progressive, multi-issue decision-making tables in 20 states - coalitions called the State Voices Network (statevoices.org) - which are non-partisan civic engagement tables active on progressive issues. Have your student group participate in coalitions like these and provide a strong feminist student presence!

Step 3: Identify key Feminist Legislators. Is there a Feminist or Women’s Caucus in your State Legislature? If yes, contact them to arrange a meeting about expected legislation that affects women and students. Make friends with legislative staff members who can become great sources of information.

Step 4: Meet with members of your state legislature to discuss important issues. When there’s proposed legislation that attacks reproductive rights, women’s rights, or social justice issues schedule appointments to meet with members of your state legislature to discuss what is at stake and your group’s position on the legislation. Ascertain their position on the issues. If there’s legislation that advances our rights, meet with members who are riding the fence about whether or not to support it and let those who are supporting the legislation know it is appreciated.

Step 5: Organize a Legislative Visit Day or Majority Day. Choose a date when both Houses are in session. Encourage participants to make appointments with their legislators.

Create briefing packets on the key issues. Hold a press conference or rally at the Capitol about them.

Step 6: Plan a demonstration, rally, or event at the Capitol if necessary for or against proposed legislation. Invite coalition speakers as well as supportive legislators. Be sure to research if there are any permits needed and how to get those permits before having an event. Once you have the permits and have started organizing, advertise the event on campus and around town, and use social media to spread the word. Also draft a press alert inviting media outlets to cover the demonstration. The more publicity and turnout, the more powerful your demonstration will be.

Step 7: Build a list of supporters through petition sign-ups, web site, and alerts. Through Wordpress and Blogger, you can create a free website to post actions alerts, news, and blogs about what legislative attacks are happening in your state. Build your email lists.. Send out alerts to this list urging supporters to contact their legislators by emails, phone, and/ or visits. Spread the word and encourage other students and friends to join the effort. Sign them up to add to the alert list.

Step 8: Encourage several of your group members to arrange for an Independent Research Project or Internship to get course credit for their legislative work. Talk to professors about counting the legislative work as course project to get credit or Independent Research Project Credit.

Step 9: Stay in touch with your FMF Campus Organizers about your progress and to seek advice as you reach out to your State Legislature. We can assist in connecting you to allies and plugging you in to state networks.

Step 10: Observe and study your legislator. Realize “I could do that, I could do that better!” Begin to plan your campaign to run for office or become a legislative aide, intern or policymaker.