

## **Ignore Reproductive Rights and They'll Go Away**

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*Social Justice Spotlight is an opinion column written by individual Social Justice Committee members. This month's Spotlight comes to us from **Bill and Joni Baird**.*

March is Women's History Month and March 22 marks the 36th anniversary of a woman's right, as well as all citizens of this nation, to use birth control through the U.S. Supreme Court case *Baird v. Eisenstadt*.

In that decision the Court wrote, "*If the right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the individual to be free...to decide whether to bear or beget a child.*"

Bill Baird and his wife Joni co-direct the Pro Choice League and will be joining our congregation. *Baird v. Eisenstadt* began when Bill challenged the Massachusetts "Crimes Against Chastity, Morality, Decency and Good Order" anti-birth control statute in 1967. Each violation of that law carried with it a five-year jail term.

*Baird* is a landmark privacy decision and the bedrock of many related cases such as *Roe v. Wade*, and the 2003 gay rights victory *Lawrence v. Texas*. (*Baird v. Bellotti I* and *Baird v. Bellotti II* are Bill's two other High Court cases that gave minors the right to abortion without parental veto.)

His commitment to women's rights for 45 years is due to the suffering he witnessed firsthand. In 1963, while coordinating research at Harlem Hospital as clinical director for a birth control manufacturer, he heard a woman scream. She stumbled down the corridor covered with blood from the waist down and died from the 8-inch piece of wire coat hanger imbedded in her uterus.

**We are at serious risk of a return to the barbaric past if we remain silent while hundreds of thousands of fundamentalists march against these rights as happened this past January 22 on *Roe v. Wade*'s 35th anniversary.**

(UU congregant Judith Smith, Bill Baird and his wife Joni marked the date in front of the Boston statehouse. However more support was needed.)

Due to recent rightwing appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court, *Roe* and other privacy cases are in jeopardy (the Court recently banned late term abortions). Bill and Joni, through their non-profit organization, are seeing frightening signs that women and teens are finding desperate means to self-abort due to restricted access to reproductive healthcare. **This issue needs renewed and immediate attention!**

Bill's pioneering efforts are part of an upcoming VH1 documentary to be aired this Spring and are featured in director Tony Kaye's (*American History X*) documentary *Lake of Fire* out on DVD March 10. Bill and Joni can be emailed through [ProChoiceLeague.org](http://ProChoiceLeague.org).