

# Coalition Building for Reproductive Justice: Hartford as a Site of Resistance against Crisis Pregnancy Centers

By Megan Faver Hartline, Erica Crowley, Eleanor Faraguna & Sam McCarthy

## ABSTRACT

In the midst of contemporary struggles to fight back against challenges to abortion rights, other important areas of reproductive justice work can be elided. One such issue area is Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs), which are non-profit (often religious) organizations that offer services like parenting classes, religious counseling, and material goods for newborns (i.e. diapers or formula), but many CPCs also present themselves as if they are comprehensive reproductive health clinics that offer abortion services. In Hartford, the four of us have been part of a larger coalition working to curb deceptive advertising practices at CPCs, and this article outlines both why CPCs are a central reproductive justice issue and how we have addressed them in our community. We argue that tactical, flexible coalitions that prioritize lived experiences of community members are key for making rhetorical interventions that advance reproductive justice. Thus, we present multiple perspectives of reproductive health partnerships—community partner (Erica), faculty (Megan), and student (Eleanor and Sam)—to analyze the role of public storytelling in coalitional activism focused on regulating crisis pregnancy centers.

## POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

We represent multiple facets of a reproductive justice partnerships—community partner, faculty, and student. At the time of our initial partnership (fall 2017 and spring 2018), Erica was an organizer with NARAL Pro-Choice CT; Megan was Director of Community Learning at Trinity College where she taught a class on community-engaged research; and Eleanor and Sam were first-year students in Megan's class. Although our positions have shifted since that time, we are all still involved in working with various reproductive justice issues both with NARAL and through other organizations.

## TAKEAWAYS

**Public writing and storytelling can be used as both a central component in a communications strategy as well as a coalition building tool in local reproductive justice issue campaigns.** Due to the highly sensitive political and emotional nature of these campaigns, rhetorical scholars are uniquely positioned to understand, support, and engage in these campaigns as coalition partners. We offer a case study on Hartford, Connecticut where a broad coalition of community groups came together to regulate crisis pregnancy centers in the city. As authors we illustrate the importance of public writing in reproductive justice campaigns and the ways that faculty and students in higher education can build partnerships with organizations doing reproductive justice work.

## TOOLS

- [Here](#) is an example of Megan's syllabus and two assignments for her first year students in Trinity College's Community Action Gateway program. In their spring course, "CACT 102: Building Knowledge for Social Change" students are asked to work with a Hartford community partner on a project that includes both research and a communications product such as a white paper, print materials, a series of infographics or social media graphics, or other written content.
- [Here is a patient story brochure](#) and [infographics](#) (both examples of print materials) created by Erica (NARAL organizer) and Eleanor and Sam (Trinity students). These were used as organizing tools when meeting with coalition partners and building support for the campaign on social media platforms.
- [Here](#) is a power map that includes the list of coalition members prepared for the evening of the public hearing on Hartford's Pregnancy Information & Disclosure ordinance. The purpose of a power map is to reveal different avenues of influence on decision makers, which in this case was the Hartford City Council.
- When engaging in organizing and advocacy on reproductive justice issues, it's important to learn from campaigns in other places, but that kind of research takes up time that understaffed organizing groups struggle for. What follows are two examples of student generated writing that have supported NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut's organizing work: [Eleanor's written report "Organizing Strategies for Comprehensive Sexual Health Education Campaigns in Connecticut,"](#) and [Sam's research poster detailing her interactive database on 5 categories of anti-choice legislation in the U.S.](#)

## ADDITIONAL LINKS

- [Trinity College Center for Hartford Engagement & Research](#)
- [NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut](#)
- [National Institute for Reproductive Health](#)
- [Moral Monday CT](#)
- [True Colors CT](#)
- [Hispanic Health Council](#)
- [John Oliver's CPC Segment on Last Week Tonight](#)