The issue of abortion has emerged in the last several decades as possibly the most significant driver of political polarization. We believe the debate around this issue has colored our politics and blinded us to vital issues at stake.

As a group of Jessamine Countians whose political identities range from quite conservative to progressive, we have extensively—and in a civil fashion—discussed this problem over recent months. We have gathered facts and considered data pertinent to the issue. We have listened to the deeply held values of those who disagree with us. As a result, we have reached consensus on some necessary approaches to this problem.

As a group, we endorse no statement on the morality of abortion, nor do we offer opinions as to whether it should remain legal. While some of us hope to see *Roe v. Wade* overturned and abortion made illegal in as many places possible, others hope *Roe* will remain in place as a framework for a national policy on abortion across most states.

Irrespective, then, of our individual beliefs about the morality of abortion or the advisability of restricting it, we embrace the following points of agreement. Whatever the future of political debate or policy making around abortion in Kentucky, we hope our fellow citizens will adopt the following "truth statements" as the backdrop for an honest and helpful discussion about abortion:

We acknowledge that it will be impossible to eliminate all abortions. Yet we do hope to reduce them dramatically, and to do so in a way that provides real help for women and children (without driving up unintended pregnancy rates or child poverty.)

It will also be impossible to ensure that all children come into the world loved, wanted, and cared for adequately. Yet we do hope to reduce births to parents who do not want and are not equipped to provide for children.

We reject the notion that supporters of abortion rights want to kill babies.

We reject the notion that abortion opponents are indifferent to women and children.

Although both political parties look to *Roe v. Wade* (whether to uphold it or overturn it) as the key element in the fight over abortion, we look beyond *Roe v. Wade* for solutions. We need a strategy beyond *Roe* because the abortion rate is unlikely to change by more than 5-10% if *Roe* is overturned. Most abortions currently happen in states (like New York and California) that are likely to uphold abortion rights. Most states inclined to outlaw abortion if *Roe* is overturned have already dramatically limited it. Women from those states will travel to other states to get abortions, and some, tragically, will resort to dangerous self-abortion procedures. Moreover, the use of abortifacient medication—the so-called "Plan B" pill—may increase dramatically if surgical abortion is limited, as has already happened in Texas.[1]

The problem of abortion is the problem of unwanted and unplanned pregnancy.

The consequences of unplanned and unwanted pregnancy generally impact women more profoundly than men.

The problem of abortion is also a problem of poverty. Women often choose abortion because they believe they are too poor to adequately care for a child. 75% of women seeking abortions are low income (49% report

[1] See Daniel K Williams, "Abortion" in *The Politics of the Cross: a Christian Alternative to Partisanship.* Grand Rapids: 2021.

incomes below the federal poverty line and 26% report incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line.) 59% of abortion-seekers already have at least one child.[2]

Eliminating abortion will increase the number of unwanted, unplanned pregnancies carried to term.

Eliminating abortion will also impact women with complicated pregnancies.

Eliminating abortion will also increase poverty among young mothers and children.

If economic concerns are the main reason for abortions, the battle against abortion must address poverty, especially as it affects women and children.

Children born and raised in poverty are more likely to fall behind in school, to drop out of school, and to require assistance as adults.

We hope some of the rhetoric around abortion will change. We urge our fellow citizens to adopt language around this issue that contributes to solutions rather than dehumanizes, demeans, and distorts. We urge our fellow citizens to foreground compassion when discussing or advocating around this issue. After all, "No woman wants an abortion as she wants an ice-cream cone or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap wants to gnaw off its own leg," Fredericia Matthews-Green has written.

Above all, we ask our political leaders to cease using this issue to divide us and instead to seek and enact effective policy solutions that reduce abortions. To that end, we advocate two specific policies that have demonstrated success in other states:

1) Above all, we urge our lawmakers to provide for a program making Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARCs) free of charge to any Kentucky woman through our county Health Departments. LARCS (such as IUDs and hormonal implants) offer the most reliable forms of birth control because, once in place, they work automatically, removing the element of human decision and error. However, the up-front costs for these devices often put them out of reach for women with financial challenges. Over a period of 8 years, a LARC program in Colorado reduced abortion rates by 60% and birth rates by 59% among women ages 15-19. Furthermore, these averted pregnancies saved Colorado an estimated $69 million in Medicaid, TANF, SNAP, and WIC public assistance expenditures. Thus a LARC program makes good economic sense, in addition to helping women control their fertility.[3]

2) We urge provisions in our laws for better, age-appropriate sex education in Kentucky schools. Such education should include information about sexual and pre-natal biology, birth control options and their efficacy, healthy relationships, and STDS.

Though we advocate no specific policies in the following areas, we generally support programs that help parents (1) properly care for their children (2) attain their own education, so that they can better provide for their children going forward (3) increase access to childcare, so that parents can work or further their educations. We also support policies directed at early childhood education and providing educational support to help children from low-income families succeed in school.

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[2] https://www.guttmacher.org/report/characteristics-us-abortion-patients-2014

[3] http://www.larc4co.com/

Important abortion facts:

Unintended pregnancy rates are highest among:

low-income women (i.e., incomes less than 200% of the federal poverty level),
women aged 18–24
women without a high-school degree

Reasons cited for seeking an abortion:

40% “not financially prepared to have a baby”
12% "want a better life for the baby than I can provide”
29% “need to focus on my other children”
31% cited problems with their partner as a factor in their decision
4 % “didn't want a baby”