



The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will to Expand Opportunity in America*

## Opportunity Toolkit

### **Reframing Reproductive Justice: California Latinas for Reproductive Justice**

Founded in 2003, California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ) is a statewide, Latina-led, advocacy organization whose mission is to advance California Latinas' reproductive health and rights within a social justice and human rights framework. "We want to ensure that California policy is reflective of the priority needs of Latinas, their families and their communities," says Rocio Cordoba, co-founder and executive director of the organization. CLRJ promote Latinas' health and ensure that they are empowered with the information and policy capacity to advocate on behalf of themselves, their families and their communities.

### **Reproductive Health and the Opportunity Frame**

From the beginning, California Latinas for Reproductive Justice had a primary goal of reframing the debate on the issues. "From day one, we knew we had to expand the terms of the conversation.," says Cordoba. "We've always believed that we needed a broader framework than just abortion and contraception. We believe that we need to discuss reproductive rights in the context of advancing the overall health and opportunities within our communities. It also has to be about freedom from violence, access to education, and all of the things that make healthy communities possible in the first place."

Rooted in the organization's philosophy is the tenet that Latinas' health disparities overall -- and reproductive health access in particular -- cannot be viewed in isolation. Rather, these issues must be assessed and addressed in light of other priorities that affect Latinas' overall health and well-being -- including their rights to self-determination and opportunities in all aspects of their lives and those of their families. Latinas' economic Security; access to equal educational opportunities; and freedom from discrimination, violence and environmental hazards in their communities, educational institutions and work places have a profound effect on Latinas' abilities to make informed choices about their health and future lives.

In their core philosophy and in their messaging, CLRJ calls upon one of the key dimensions of the Opportunity Frame: Security. It is the American ideal that regardless of race, class or gender, no one should be denied a basic level of health, education or economic well-being. It is only through the protections offered by these basic securities that Latinas -- and all people -- can fully participate in society, availing themselves of their rights and fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in society.

### **Statewide Challenge**

When Governor Schwarzenegger called the special statewide election of November 2005, three wealthy activists seized on California's ballot initiative process to advance their anti-reproductive rights agenda. They were clear that their goal was to outlaw all abortions, and their initiative -- dubbed "the Parents' Right to Know and Child Protection Initiative," -- would have provided an incremental step toward that end by amending California's constitution to prohibit abortion for a minor until 48 hours after a physician notified

the girls' parent/guardian. Proposition 73, as the proposal was titled on the state ballot, would have mandated reporting requirements and authorized monetary damages against physicians for violations.

California Latinas for Reproductive Justice joined with a number of allied organizations to form the Campaign for Teen Safety -- a broad-based coalition of doctors, nurses, health care providers, educators, civil rights and women's groups, including the League of Women Voters. The coalition launched into an aggressive campaign to defeat the initiative, including a statewide grassroots voter education effort, and a media campaign that ran paid ads in key California media markets.

## Framing

"Minor's access is the toughest reproductive health issue to frame, and not necessarily what we would have wanted to lead with for our first campaign," says Cordoba. The campaign chose to focus and frame its efforts around the security of youth that would be directly affected by the measure, hence the core message: "Keep Teens Safe – Vote No on Prop 73." Research indicated this message had wide appeal with a range of California voters, and that it could be tailored to meet the interests of various communities and constituencies.

"We endorsed and echoed that campaign message, because we felt it would resonate with the realities in our communities – young Latinas don't need any more blockades to healthcare," says Cordoba, citing dire statistics that point to a major gap in health care:

- Nearly one-third of Latina women in California are uninsured, representing 56% of the state's uninsured women.
- California's Latinas have among the lowest rates of breast cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment, and are more likely than White women to die from the disease.
- The incidence of cervical cancer in Latinas age 30 and older is almost twice the incidence in other racial and ethnic groups of women the same age.

By highlighting how the disparities in health care adversely affected the security of Latinas, CLRJ also addressed another core dimension of the **Opportunity Frame: equality**. In its focus on the evidence of health disparities facing Latinas, CLRJ called upon the basic American value of fairness, which demands that we all share equal access to the benefits and responsibilities of our society. Equality means that American opportunity and prosperity, and a healthy life should be available to all of us, regardless of who we are or where we come from. CLRJ used hard evidence, as well as moral arguments, to show the unequal treatment that Proposition 73 would impose.

Given CLRJ's constituency and its unique role in the coalition for Teen Safety, its members also felt the campaign frame had to be more comprehensive in order to engage a Latina audience. "For us, this wasn't just an issue of teen pregnancy prevention," says Cordoba. "It's also about opportunity for teens – socioeconomic status, educational attainment. The factors behind teen pregnancy are much broader than teen behavior, so we want to put the issue in that broader context. It's really a question of opportunity -- are we giving young people the opportunity to be healthy, to achieve their own goals in life? We need to provide young people medically accurate information as well as access to services and supports that give them the opportunity to make well-informed decisions and to live a fulfilling, healthy life."

## Reaching Latino Voters

CLRJ played an especially important role in helping the campaign reach Latino voters. Along with several coalition partners, CLRJ offered a series of voter education workshops on Prop 73, helping Latino voters understand the impacts of the measure on their communities and concerns. One of CLRJ's roles in the

coalition was to translate the coalition's key messages into language that would resonate with Latinos in the state, and to explain why the coalition's concerns were relevant to Latino voters.

CLRJ also tailored the campaign's message and worked to get the word out to community groups and ethnic media. The statewide campaign knew that Los Angeles County in particular could play a decisive role in the outcome of the election, so CLRJ focused deeply on Spanish language media in Los Angeles. Newspapers *La Opinion* and *Hoy* both covered the campaign, as did television outlets like *Telemundo* and *Univision*. All carried the message that Proposition 73 was dangerous for young Latinas. *La Opinion* even ran an editorial opposing the measure.

"The positive response of Spanish language media is one of the best qualitative measure of CLRJ's successful role in the campaign," says Cordoba.

## **The Win.... And Beyond**

On Tuesday, November 8, 2005 Californians voted to defeat Prop 73, by a margin of 53% to 47%. Now that CLRJ and its allies have won this defensive battle, they are ready to go on the offense, and have plans to launch an effort to secure unbiased, comprehensive, culturally and linguistically appropriate reproductive health and sexuality rights education for youth. According to Cordoba, "Comprehensive sex education is another opportunity for education, and for us to help teens with the tools to make their own opportunities in life."