



Zonta Club of Kitchener Waterloo

To: President Jane Newman and Members of the Zonta Club of Kitchener Waterloo

Date: April 17, 2019

Subject: Zonta International – Reproductive Health Policy

Recommendation:

That the Zonta Club of Kitchener Waterloo request that the ZI Board review the Reproductive Health Policy and undertake the following:

- remove the following statement “That Zonta does not take a ‘pro or ‘con position on abortion; and
- Realign the call to action currently contained in the Reproductive Health Policy with goals of the biennium, the UN goals and general support for reproductive health (proposal attached); and

That this resolution be circulated to the Zonta International Board, the International Advocacy Committee for action; and

That this resolution be circulated to District 4 Board with the intent that this motion be forwarded to the D4 conference in September for discussion and support.

Summary:

In January 2018, the Zonta Club of Kitchener Waterloo raised concerns about two Zonta International (ZI) policies, Affiliation with Other Organizations Policy and the Reproductive Health Policy. The Affiliation with Other Organizations Policy has been changed by ZI however the Reproductive Health Policy remains the same. The purpose of this report to start the process to have the Reproductive Health policy changed.

Report:

Background

The ZI Board has the ability to establish policies for the operations of the organization. ZI has a number of policies that were established by the board that cover a variety of topics. In November 2014, ZI established the Women’s Reproductive Health Policy. There was discussion with the District Governors at the time this policy was developed,

however ultimately the decision on the policy was made by the ZI Board. There was limited discussion with Districts or clubs on the content of this policy and there is no requirement for the Board to do so.

This policy was brought to the Zonta Club of Kitchener Waterloo's attention when discussions developed regarding the club's participation in *Women's March*. District Governors at the time were asked to relay information to clubs outlining the ZI Board's position that participation as Zontians in marches was against both the Affiliation with Other Organizations Policy and the Women's Reproductive Health Policy. Discussions at the time also referred to ZI's neutral position on abortion. The Club sent a letter to the International Board asking that the Board review both policies. Since that time, the Affiliation with Other Organizations Policy has been amended and clubs can participate in Women's March provided it is in keeping with Zonta mandate.

The club's request for the Board to review and amend the Reproductive Health policy remains outstanding.

Women's Reproductive Health

The World Health Organization defines reproductive rights as follows:

Reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. The rights also include the right of all to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

Women's reproductive rights may include some or all of the following: the right to birth control; freedom from coerced sterilization and contraception; the right to access good-quality reproductive healthcare; the right to education and access in order to make free and informed reproductive choices; and the right to legal and safe abortion;.

Reproductive rights may also include the right to receive education about sexually transmitted infections and other aspects of sexuality, and protection from practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM).

The UN claims that countries and states have obligations to respect, protect and fulfill rights related to women's sexual and reproductive health. This includes the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The UN goes on to say that women are entitled to reproductive health care services, goods and facilities that are:

- (a) available in adequate numbers;
- (b) accessible physically and economically;
- (c) accessible without discrimination; and
- (d) of good quality.

The Beijing Platform for Action states that "*the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their*

sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.” The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recommends that Countries prioritise the “prevention of unwanted pregnancy through family planning and sex education.

The United Nations has information readily available on women’s reproductive health including information on abortion.

Why are we concerned?

The Zonta Club of Kitchener Waterloo appreciates the changes made to the Affiliation with Other Organizations Policy; however, members continue to express concerns related to the Reproductive Health policy as outline below.

- a) ZI should be supporting the intrinsic rights of safe reproductive health and not focusing on one small narrow portion of these overall rights.
- b) ZI aligns itself with the United Nations and the UN supports “Women’s Rights as Human Rights’ and has taken action to develop programs and services that empower women on all issues including those related to reproductive health including abortion.
- c) Women’s reproductive health must include education and information related to all options so responsible decision making can occur.
- d) The current policy appears to be contradictory and lacks clarity e.g. ZI doesn’t take a position on abortion however it calls on governments to manage unsafe abortions and manage unwanted pregnancies, ZI’s Advocacy presentation materials include information universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.
- e) If ZI is truly neutral on the issue of abortion, it should not pass judgement on clubs who support reproductive health including abortion through advocacy or funding-raising.
- f) ZI has used the Reproductive Health Policy to restrict the activities of clubs in the past, regardless of whether a state or country already has access to abortion.

Revise the Policy Statement

ZI Board needs to ensure that the policy statements align with the biennium goals. The current policy statement is not enhanced, in our view, by including the reference to abortion. The policy can remain neutral without making reference to abortion but clearly indicating what is supported. Therefore, it is recommended that the statement “Zonta International does not take a pro or con position on abortion” should be removed from the statement. This removal would then require that the remaining statements included in the policy be reworded. A proposal is attached to this report. This proposal is a suggestion and since this is a ZI Board policy ZI should have some flexibility to determine how the wording of the policy is developed.

Alternatively the ZI Board could review the policy with respect to relevancy. Perhaps the policy is no longer required and Zonta’s policies or strategic goals already over shadow this policy. In that case the policy should just be eliminated and the goals of the biennium should be the focus.

We do believe the ZI Board and our fellow Zontians support that every woman has the intrinsic right of safe reproductive health. While reproductive health may include abortion, it is greatly overshadowed by the overall principles of equal access to information and education; individual decision making; family planning; and access good-quality reproductive healthcare.

Process

Since the policy is the responsibility of the ZI Board and not included in the by-laws, a letter requesting this change can be sent directly to the ZI Board. However since there is time for further discussion, the resolution, recommendation can also be sent to the D4 Board for inclusion in the District conference in September. Recently the call for resolutions and by-laws amendment was sent to members and this proposal would align with the timing.

Prepared By: Kris Fletcher

Approved By: Zonta Board

Existing Policy Statement	Proposed Policy Statement
<p>Zonta International is an organization pledged to improve the health status of women.</p> <p>Zonta international calls on governments to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The elimination of all child marriages and similar unions • Equal rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of children and to have access to the information, education and means to exercise these rights • Access to health care services, including those services related to family planning. <p>Zonta International does not take a 'pro' or 'con position on abortion. Recognizing that it is a complex issue. Zonta International calls on government to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of complications from unsafe abortions is part of public reproductive health programs • Prevention of unwanted pregnancies is given the highest priority. 	<p>Zonta International is an organization pledged to improve the health status of women <u>and believes every women has the intrinsic right to safe reproductive health.</u></p> <p>Zonta International calls on governments to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate all child marriages and similar unions; • Provide equal access to information and education on reproductive health to both men and women; • Provide equal access to health care services, including those services related to family planning and the prevention of unwanted pregnancies; • Provide opportunities to women to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of children; and the prevention of unwanted pregnancies.