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SRCD 2023 Biennial Meeting Location and Launch of Presidential Initiative

In June, the United States Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* (Constitutional protection for the right to an abortion) and gave states the power to regulate abortions. Since then, Utah, along with many other states, has enacted “trigger laws,” effectively banning abortions except in limited circumstances. (Utah's trigger law is currently under a temporary restraining order.) Given the potential negative implications of the ban of abortions for the health of women and families, many SRCD members, along with members of the Governing Council and the Biennial Co-Chairs, requested that SRCD reconsider holding its Biennial Meeting in the state of Utah. The assumption is that holding a meeting in Utah represents an implicit support of their policies.

After announcing that we were reconsidering hosting the Biennial Meeting in Utah, other members expressed regret at that decision. Some wished that we placed a greater emphasis on the neonates, as a Society focused on child development; some felt that SRCD should not punish an entire local community because of a political decision; and still others felt that, because abortion laws are under threat in nearly half of the states, we as an organization of scientists should not run away from the challenge and bring science to bear to improve policies and practices in support of women and families.

As was noted in our earlier communication, it is a significant undertaking to move the Biennial Meeting at this late date. Decisions about the location of Biennial Meetings are made years in advance and the location of the 2023 Biennial Meeting was decided in 2018. **After investigating several possibilities, the Governing Council has decided to keep the 2023 Biennial meeting in Salt Lake City.** We would like to explain the several factors that led to this outcome.

Financial Penalties. SRCD begins signing contracts to host the Biennial Meeting up to ten years in advance of the meeting dates. These contracts ensure that the city is prepared to host a meeting of our size and include significant penalties for cancellation. Should we cancel the 2023 contracts at this time, SRCD will incur substantial financial penalties – more than three quarters of a million dollars. As one of the main impetuses of moving the meeting is to not financially support Utah, given its policies, cancelling at this late date would mean that we are still spending a significant amount of money in Utah with no benefit to the Society.

Further, SRCD has already experienced the financial losses associated with cancelling an in-person Biennial meeting. SRCD experienced sizeable fiscal losses from the cancellation of the onsite portion of the 2021 Biennial Meeting (due to COVID-19), which was to be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. While circumstances were out of our control, we were still held financially accountable to the penalties stipulated in the contracts. Given our nonprofit status and our desire to be good stewards of our financial resources, it is not a fiscally sound decision to move the Biennial Meeting from Utah and incur the financial penalties.

Lack of other viable options. SRCD Biennial Meetings typically draw about 6,000 attendees and are considered "city-wide" conferences. As such, there are a limited number of locations that can accommodate our meeting size. Many of the cities book up years in advance, leaving only a few cities that might be available on this short notice. Among those, many are removed from consideration because of they also have restrictive laws or are putting such laws in place. The impact of the U.S. Supreme Court decision is fluid and dynamic. It is difficult to predict how states will respond in the coming months.

The Salt Lake City Conundrum. As we have been studying the impact of the U.S. Supreme Court decision, we have learned that Salt Lake City has made great strides in ways consistent with SRCD values and goals. There are many examples of social progress being striven for and made in fighting racism and poverty, and in achieving equality and protection for all people including people of color, LGBTQ+ people, incarcerated individuals, and immigrant-origin individuals. In fact, earlier this year Salt Lake City swore in a City Council that is majority LGBTQ+ and majority people of color – unlike any other major city in the nation. By moving the conference to a different location, might we be punishing the Utah city that is leading the state in support for women and children? Should we instead go to Salt Lake City and join them in their efforts to bring about change via strong science, diverse individuals working together, and community outreach?

After grappling with these many questions and consulting others, we came to the decision to keep the 2023 Biennial Meeting in Salt Lake City. Moving forward, we will invest in:

- Launching a **Presidential Working Group on the Evidence of the Impact of Overturning Roe v. Wade on Women and Families** (more on this below).
- Engaging with the Salt Lake City community and local officials to identify ways SRCD can meaningfully support and collaborate with advocacy organizations before and during the meeting.
- Providing resources and experts with accurate information and evidenced-based practices and policies that might be implemented to make communities a safer and healthier place for all children to develop.

Launching a Presidential Working Group on the Evidence of the Impact of Overturning Roe v. Wade on Women and Families. Policymakers, the press, and other outlets have been chronicling the plausible negative sequelae for women, while others have touted rights for the unborn. Many of these discussions lack sound scientific foundations for their assertions. SRCD, as a scientific organization, has a mission to advance the developmental sciences and promote the use of developmental research to improve human lives. The proposed Presidential Working Group will infuse scientific evidence into the discourse, promote evidence-based practices and policy solutions, and identify gaps in knowledge where transdisciplinary, multisector research-practice partnerships can bring new evidence to light.

The Working Group will present a session at the 2023 Biennial Meeting and produce nimble and usable deliverables (e.g., resource website; expert lists; pamphlets—to be decided by the group), with the goal that these resources might empower organizations, agencies, and governments with evidence and catalyze research to protect and improve outcomes for women and families.

We anticipate that the working group will consist of five to seven individuals from multiple disciplines/sectors nominated from the membership who will work on this for six to eight months. **We invite SRCD members to nominate themselves or others to join this Presidential Working Group. Please complete the form below by August 19, 2022.**

FILL OUT FORM

Members of the working group will be selected by the SRCD President and alerted in September.

Please know that we are fully committed to the health and well-being of our attendees, staff, and the local community while onsite.

Sincerely,

Nancy E. Hill, President
Gigi Luk, Program Co-Chair
Rashmita S. Mistry, Program Co-Chair