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Dear Neighbor,

“Are you and Mom still married?” my son Ezra asked me, the morning after Trump was elected. I told him I was worried about a lot of things after the election, but I assured him that his moms would stay married.

It was a moment filled with sadness and fear, and also with pride. Sadness that my sons, Simon and Ezra, now 9 and 12, would have formative years with a President who would never be a role model. Fear that important protections could be taken away from people - including my family, but especially communities of color and immigrants. And also pride, that Ezra was mature enough to understand that the election mattered.

That morning I pledged to Ezra that we would fight the Trump administration and work to protect our family, our friends, and our community.

I have spent my life advocating for progressive change. As a mother, a public service lawyer, and a healthcare advocate, I have fought for strong policies to advance economic, racial, and reproductive justice in our state. These experiences helped me decide to run for State Representative, so I can bring that fight and determination to the State House.

I wanted to reach out and share who I am and why I’m running. **I’m running to bring my experience as a leader and an advocate for progressive values to the State House because policy and law change lives.**

My grandparents emigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe as children around 1900. They fled anti-Semitism, pogroms and oppression in Europe. Here in America, they built successful businesses and were grateful for the opportunities and religious freedom they found here – gratitude they passed on to me.

My parents divorced when I was in third grade. They had very different views, so I’d discuss Democratic policies at my Mom’s dinner table and debate Republican ideas at my Dad’s. My siblings and I learned to defend our ideas, listen to diverse views, and appreciate good food and family regardless of difference.

I first came to Rhode Island to attend Brown University. While I was a student, I volunteered at the Women’s Center of Rhode Island, a shelter in Providence for women fleeing violence. I saw firsthand how our legal system often frustrated and overwhelmed the very women it should protect. I decided to go to law school to become an advocate.

After graduating from Georgetown Law School, I worked as a law clerk. By then I had met the love of my life, Joanna Brown, and when she matched for her residency in family medicine in Rhode Island, I was delighted to move back to Providence.

I helped start a medical-legal advocacy program for low-income people in Worcester, Massachusetts and then joined Rhode Island Legal Services. I worked alongside Rhode Islanders who often faced a system that didn’t work – whether it was a lack of education,

inadequate healthcare, unemployment or unsafe neighborhoods. I worked with families at Hasbro Children's Hospital and saw every day how a lack of affordable, safe and healthy housing -- apartments infested with vermin, windows covered in lead paint - was causing health problems for their children.

Sometimes, it only took a call or a letter from a lawyer to get a landlord's attention, or to ensure an educational plan was appropriate. It became increasingly clear to me that strong advocacy for individuals wasn't enough. We needed systemic change. We needed to build a system that made it easier for people like my clients, and all of us, to thrive.

I joined the Rhode Island Health Center Association to fight for accessible health care for all and represent our state's community health centers at the State House. For seven years, I attended hearings, provided testimony, educated elected officials, and learned how the General Assembly functions. I worked hard to implement the Affordable Care Act, and as co-chair of the Rhode Island State Oral Health Commission, fought successfully to maintain dental coverage in state Medicaid insurance. I know the complexities of healthcare and will continue to fight for universal healthcare as a right for everyone.

In 2003, Joanna and I married in a religious ceremony at Roger Williams Park, before marriages like ours were recognized in any state. When our boys were born, we made complex plans to ensure the legal system would see us as a family. After marriage equality became law in Massachusetts, we married there. We joined others in the fight here at home, and in 2013, celebrated with our boys at the RI State House when marriage equality became law.

I've spent a lot of time trying to make our community better. I am a very active member of Temple Emanu-El, and I recently served as President of Rhode Island's chapter of the National Organization for Women. Last year, RI NOW helped pass legislation to take guns away from domestic violence offenders, and I was part of a team that won earned sick days for Rhode Island working families. I'm very proud of my work, but we still live in a state that doesn't protect a woman's right to choose, or ensure that she will be paid as much as her male colleagues, or guarantee that anyone who works hard will earn a wage that keeps them out of poverty.

I'm running for State Representative because there is so much more that needs to be done.

Thinking back to that morning with Ezra, as we were rushing to get ready for school when we were sad and scared for our country under Donald Trump, I knew that our community would be our strength. We have rallied together, resisted together, and now it's time to demonstrate our values through another election. I am excited about what we can achieve. And now, I respectfully ask for your vote.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Kislak

P.S. I look forward to meeting you over the next few months when I am out knocking on doors. In the meantime, if you have ideas or questions, please contact me at rebecca@rebeccakislak.com or **401-400-2338**. You can also learn more about my campaign, and sign up for email updates at www.RebeccaKislak.com. I look forward to talking with you!