

April 19, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-146A, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen, and Ranking Member Lowey:

As you work to prepare legislation to fund the government past April 28, we write to strongly oppose the inclusion of ideological policy riders that are harmful to women's health.

Opponents of women's health have long used the appropriations process to undermine women's access to comprehensive reproductive care, including access to safe and legal abortion. We continue to strongly oppose policy riders that deny insurance coverage of abortion for women enrolled in Medicaid, women who work for the federal government, women who live in the District of Columbia, and others, as well as riders that embolden health care entities to refuse to comply with laws that ensure women's access to abortion services.

A number of new anti-women's health policy riders are included in individual FY 2017 appropriations bills passed either by the House Appropriations Committee or the full House. Additionally, passage of a much-needed supplemental funding bill to address the growing Zika crisis was brought to a halt last year in large part due to efforts to include a rider blocking funding for certain reproductive health providers in Puerto Rico that are uniquely positioned to provide critical health care services to women and men on the island. Finally, misguided efforts to block patients from accessing care at Planned Parenthood health centers have threatened to shut down the entire federal government and may do so again this year. We oppose the poison-pill riders we have seen in House appropriations bills, listed below, and any additional policy riders that would harm women's health.

- **Sweeping new religious refusal language that would allow employers, insurers, and health care providers to deny others access to critical health care services.** The FY 2017 House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) appropriations bill includes language, taken from the Health Care Conscience Rights Act (HCCRA), that would allow an employer or insurance company to refuse coverage of *any* health care service to which they have an objection and would also limit access to abortion by embedding provisions that would permit a broad range of health care entities to refuse care, information, referral, and coverage related to abortion – including in serious emergency situations.
- **Language blocking the Reproductive Health Non-Discrimination Amendment Act (RHNDAA), a law passed unanimously by the Council of the District of Columbia.** The FY 2017 House Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) appropriations bill includes a provision that would stop implementation of RHNDAA, a local law that protects employees who work in DC from workplace discrimination based on the employees' personal reproductive health care decisions, like using in-vitro fertilization or birth control.
- **A provision that extends existing harmful restrictions on insurance coverage of abortion by banning all multi-state plans under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) from including such coverage.** The FY 2017 House FSGG bill includes a provision that would take away existing health insurance coverage, thereby further restricting a woman's access to safe and legal abortion.

- **Language that restricts access to abortion for women in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention.** The FY 2017 House Homeland Security appropriations bill includes a ban on coverage and provision of abortion services for individuals in ICE custody except in cases of rape, incest, and a very narrow definition of life endangerment. Furthermore, the language includes a harmful refusal provision, allowing any ICE employee to refuse “to perform or facilitate in any way” any abortion.
- **A sweeping new refusal provision that would allow employers to discriminate against women and LGBT workers.** During floor consideration of the FY 2017 Energy and Water Appropriations bill, the House passed an amendment from Representative Byrne (R-AL) that sanctions taxpayer-funded discrimination and is the latest attempt to further embed discriminatory policies into federal law. This amendment would insert refusal provisions into the Energy & Water bill that would undermine important protections for women and LGBT individuals.

While the two riders described below are also included as poison-pill riders in the FY 2017 House State and Foreign Operations (SFOPs) committee passed bill, the Administration did not wait for Congress to act to impose these harmful and dangerous policies on women and girls around the world. Instead, the Administration has already done so using executive authority.

- **Reinstatement of the global gag rule, also known as the Mexico City Policy, a provision that greatly undermines access to family planning services around the world.** The FY 2017 House SFOPs committee passed bill included the global gag rule, which denies overseas organizations U.S. international family planning assistance if they provide information, referrals, or services for legal abortion or advocate for the legalization of abortion in their country, even if these activities are supported solely with non-U.S. funds - a policy that would be unconstitutional if applied in the U.S. While we oppose the imposition of the expanded global gag rule by the Administration, it would be unprecedented to impose this policy legislatively.
- **Prohibition on U.S. contributions to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).** The FY 2017 House State and Foreign Operations (SFOPs) committee passed bill cut off funding for UNFPA’s life-saving maternal and reproductive health services to the poorest communities in more than 150 countries, including those facing Zika, humanitarian crises, and conflict. We are alarmed by the Administration’s recent determination under the Kemp-Kasten Amendment to withhold U.S. contributions to UNFPA, an organization which is working to promote human rights and combat coercive practices, and oppose any actions by Congress to impose this unfounded prohibition legislatively.

As you and your colleagues make critical decisions about FY 2017 funding bills, we urge you to protect women’s health by ensuring that these and any other ideological policy riders are excluded.

Sincerely,

Abortion Care Network

Advocates for Youth

AIDS Action Baltimore

AIDS Foundation of Chicago

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Civil Liberties Union

American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American Humanist Association

American Medical Student Association

American Sexual Health Association

Amnesty International USA
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals
Better World Campaign
Black Women's Health Imperative
Catholics for Choice
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
Center for Reproductive Rights
DC Fights Back!
Feminist Majority
Global Health Council
Human Rights Campaign
Human Rights Watch
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive
Justice Agenda
International Women's Health Coalition
Ipas
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Abortion Federation
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Center For Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Health Law Program
National Institute for Reproductive Health
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women's Health Network
National Women's Law Center
New Voices for Reproductive Justice
PAI
People For the American Way
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Population Connection Action Fund
Population Council

Population Institute

Presbyterian AIDS Network (PAN) (PHEWA), PC USA

Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S.
(SIECUS)

SisterReach

Treatment Action Group

URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity

Voices for Progress

Women Thrive Alliance

Women's Refugee Commission