

November 13, 2009

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Leahy,

Thank you for your personal leadership on international family planning and reproductive health issues. As Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman for State Department, Foreign Operation and Related Programs, you have ensured that funds are directed to important programs that save women's lives, improve the survival of families, and reduce poverty.

The undersigned organizations respectfully request that the FY 2010 appropriation measure funding foreign assistance programs include both a provision to bar a future President from re-imposing the Mexico City Policy (global gag rule) and \$648.5 million for family planning and reproductive health programs, including \$60 million for a U.S. contribution to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

President Obama rightfully overturned the Mexico City Policy as one of his first acts. While the gag rule was in effect, it severely hampered the effectiveness of the U.S. government's family planning program by excluding many otherwise qualified grantees, and limiting the activities of others. Even today, some USAID missions are reluctant to reestablish relationships with some indigenous and foreign NGOs because most USAID grants are multiyear awards that might stretch beyond the current administration.

This must end. As you know, the Appropriations Committee adopted during markup a Lautenberg amendment to the State-Foreign Operations bill that would bar future administrations from imposing the Mexico City Policy unilaterally. We urge you to maintain this provision in conference with the House. As recently as January of this year, the Senate resoundingly defeated on a vote of 37 to 60 a Martinez amendment to an unrelated bill that would have reversed President Obama's action and reinstated the gag rule.

We were heartened that the Committee also provided \$628.5 million for family planning and reproductive health, including \$50 million for UNFPA. The House had earlier adopted even higher amounts, \$648.5 million total, including \$60 million for UNFPA. We urge you to adopt the higher House-passed level in the final conference agreement. Approval of this funding increase would be an important down payment toward reaching the \$1 billion necessary to provide the U.S. fair share of the cost of meeting the global unmet need for contraception each year.

Mr. Chairman, your support is critical in the end game for the 2010 appropriations cycle. We urge you to maintain the important successes that came through your Subcommittee this summer and stand firmly against those who would use this opportunity to weaken these important advances. The majority of American women and men, as well as the leadership of these organizations, will stand with you.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth
American Association of University Women
American Civil Liberties Union

American Humanist Association
American Jewish World Service
American Public Health Association
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals
CARE
Catholics for Choice
Center for Environment and Population (CEP)
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
Center for Reproductive Rights
Center for Women Policy Studies
Family Care International
Feminist Majority
Global AIDS Alliance
Human Rights Watch
International Planned Parenthood Federation
International Planned Parenthood Federation Western Hemisphere Region
International Women's Health Coalition
Ipas
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Association of Social Workers
National Audubon Society
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Women's Organizations
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
Pathfinder International
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Population Action International
Population Connection
Population Institute
PSI (Population Services International)
Secular Coalition for America
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
Sierra Club
Soroptomist International of the Americas
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society
Women Thrive
Women's Refugee Commission