

August 5, 2009

The Honorable First Last
Address
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Last:

We are writing to urge your support for language included in the FY 2010 State Department, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations bill to permanently protect international family planning providers from the egregious Global Gag Rule.

This provision, offered by Sen. Lautenberg and adopted by the Committee, will ensure that these crucial health care providers are not deemed ineligible for U.S. assistance simply because they offer a health service, either directly or through referral, that is legal both within their own countries and in the United States. It also states that these agencies may not face restrictions on their free speech and advocacy rights that are not applied to U.S. based organizations.

As you may know, the Global Gag Rule went beyond long standing law barring the use of U.S. money for abortion services, and limited what providers could do with funds from other sources – including from other governments.

We were deeply gratified when President Obama lifted the policy within a week of assuming office and when you joined with the majority of the Senate in opposing an amendment offered by Sen. Martinez to reinstate it. We are confident that this action will benefit thousands of women. The fact that a future president could just as easily reimpose the Global Gag Rule, though, is cause for serious concern. Indeed, reports from the field suggest there is now reluctance on the part of some U.S.-funded organizations to work with other family planning service providers who were unable to be funded during the Bush administration as a result of the gag rule. This reluctance is due to uncertainty as to whether those organizations will be able to continue to participate in a project over its full five-year period or will be forced to drop off the team if the gag rule were to be reinstated under a new administration. The concern about partnering with these affected groups will almost certainly intensify as the next election cycle approaches.

For far too long, the health and rights of women in the developing world have been treated by American policymakers as little more than a tool in a domestic political struggle. We strongly urge you to oppose any effort to strip the Lautenberg amendment from the bill.

Sincerely,

Population Connection
NARAL Pro-Choice America
CARE
Pathfinder International

The Population Institute
Center for Environment and Population
International Planned Parenthood Federation
National Council of Jewish Women
Ipas
Secular Coalition for America
Women Thrive Worldwide
The Center for Women Policy Studies
National Council of Women's Organizations
National Organization for Women
American Association of University Women
International Planned Parenthood Federation – Western Hemisphere Region
Population Council
American Jewish World Service
Union for Reform Judaism
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals
American Humanist Association
Women's Refugee Commission
American Civil Liberties Union
International Women's Health Coalition
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
National Association of Social Workers
Population Action International
Population Services International
Global Health Council
Feminist Majority
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
Center for Reproductive Rights
EngenderHealth
Catholics for Choice
Advocates for Youth
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)