

November 20, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
437 Russell Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: 26 Faith Groups Urge Senators to Protect Title X

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy and Committee Members,

The undersigned religious, religiously affiliated and faith-centered organizations and communities collectively represent millions of people of faith. As organizations and as individuals, we are committed to ensuring that all women have equitable and affordable access to healthcare and that their individual reproductive choices are respected. We write to express our grave concern regarding the administration's recent attacks on the Title X family planning program and our deep opposition to the newest rule restricting access to care. We urge you to block implementation of the Title X rule and restore the integrity of the program.

Although we come from diverse traditions, we are united in our alarm that family planning providers are caught between meeting the needs of their patients or following an unethical policy that hinders proper care. Family planning providers, from state governments to Planned Parenthood affiliates, are being forced to leave the Title X program. This leaves many of our most vulnerable around the country without access to the reproductive healthcare and information they need. The consequences for society will be devastating, especially for women of color, LGBTQ individuals and those of lower income. Already, six states have no active Title X provider.

Respecting each person's dignity and autonomy is an essential principle of our faiths. Impeding one's ability to make decisions about reproduction according to her own values is an assault on her human dignity. This rule restricts free speech and freedom of choice and uses women's healthcare as a pawn in the administration's efforts to placate its conservative supporters. The reality is that these changes to Title X will hurt Americans gravely, denying critical healthcare services—such as contraception, breast and cervical cancer screenings and STI treatment and prevention—for close to 4 million of the most marginalized in our society.

Our varied religious traditions support the moral authority of individuals to make their own decisions about family planning, and we all share a dedication to helping those who are vulnerable. We are compelled by our faith to speak out against policies that unfairly target those who already face obstacles and burdens in seeking care. The vast majority of people of faith believe that *all* people are moral agents—regardless of income. We believe this should entitle each person to follow their own inner compass when making decisions about their reproductive health, free from undue constraint or impediment.

Additionally, the rule flies in the face of many American values, including unencumbered access to accurate information and freedom from the moral judgment of others regardless of socioeconomic status. This regulation will all but destroy a program that has helped millions of people across the United States for almost 50 years and pave the way for untested, unproven organizations—hostile to providing women with the full range of information and services—to profit by offering less information and fewer options. Religious leaders and many in our communities have a long history of supporting women regardless of their personal family planning choices. Both before and since the *Roe v Wade* decision, clergy have counseled women as they make decisions regarding pregnancy, and many people of faith have worked to ensure that comprehensive family planning services are accessible to all who need them.

As organizations and communities committed to the protection of religious freedom for every individual, we expect others to respect our sincerely held beliefs *and* believe it is wrong to impose our beliefs on others. We are deeply troubled by the Trump administration’s deliberate misinterpretation of the foundational principle of religious liberty as that which protects only the expression of one narrow set of religious beliefs. We strongly believe, as people of faith, that it is wrong to allow a powerful minority to impose their beliefs on the rest of us. The religious freedom guaranteed by our Constitution encompasses both freedom of religion and the freedom from any one set of religious beliefs being encoded into public law.

As religious, religiously affiliated and faith-centered organizations and communities, we urge you as a member of Congress to protect Title X and block implementation of the unethical Title X rule while restoring the integrity of the program. As agents of the critical checks and balances in our system, we ask you to keep the executive branch, through the US Department of Health and Human Services, from undermining access to comprehensive healthcare and instead return to its mission of promoting the health and wellbeing of all Americans, including the most vulnerable and marginalized among us.

Respectfully,

ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Call to Action USA
Catholics for Choice
Habonim Dror North America
Global Justice Institute
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Jewish Labor Committee
Jewish Women International
Keshet
New Mexico Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights

Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC)
Muslims for Progressive Values
National Council of Jewish Women
Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options
Presbyterian Feminist Agenda Network
Reconstructing Judaism
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Rhode Island Coalition for Reproductive Freedom
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)
Women of Reform Judaism

CC: Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

*For additional information on this letter, please contact Glenn Northern at 202-986-6093;
gnorthern@catholicsforchoice.org or Shannon Russell at 240 509 5508 srussell@ncjw.org*