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Planned Parenthood Applauds Introduction of New Legislation to Move Women’s Health Forward

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“This aptly-named bill not only brings women into the 21st century — it launches us forward,” said Cecile Richards, president, Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

WASHINGTON, DC — Today Senator Patty Murray, along with Senator Barbara Mikulski and Senator Barbara Boxer, introduced the 21st Century Women’s Health Act in Congress, which lays out important ways the country can and should move forward on women’s health. This bill would build upon the incredible progress made in public health outcomes over the last century thanks to increased access to women’s reproductive health care — from a 40-year low in teen pregnancy rates to the majority of undergraduate students who are women.

“We applaud Senators Murray, Mikulski, and Boxer for the introduction of the 21st Century Women’s Health Act in Congress today. This aptly-named bill not only brings women into the

21st century — it launches us forward,” said Cecile Richards, president, Planned Parenthood Federation of America. **“At Planned Parenthood, we’ve seen the progress that comes when women can make their own health care decisions, without politicians standing in the way. Together, through this bill and other efforts, we will keep working to ensure that women across the country have the information and access they need to make decisions about their health care and their futures.”**

“Women deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and this bill helps give them the tools they need to lead happy, healthy lives,” said **Dr. Laurel Kuehl, Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest’s Washington medical director.** **“I’m lucky to practice in a state where elected officials understand that it’s best when decisions are left between me and my patients. I know that for my colleagues across the country — things aren’t that easy. That’s why it is so important that we have champions in Congress like Senator Murray working to expand access to health care instead of standing in the way. From contraception to childbearing, a woman’s reproductive well-being is a major part of her health and her economic well-being.”**

This month, in honor of National Women’s History Month (March), Planned Parenthood is celebrating the gains women have made in the last century and urging policy makers across the country to move forward — not backward — on women’s health and rights.

The 21st Century Women’s Health Act introduced by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) is legislation that embraces all of the progress that has been made for women and in public health by building upon all of the successes and ensuring that women will continue to have access to the full range of reproductive health care.

Strengthen Reproductive Health Care Access for Women

- *Title X Family Planning Program* - Serves nearly five million low-income individuals receiving confidential health care services at nearly 4,200 Title X health centers every year. In every state, women and men rely on the Title X program for basic primary and preventive health care, including annual well-woman exams, lifesaving cancer screenings, contraception and testing and treatment for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). In fact, 6 in 10 women who access care from a family planning health center consider it their main source of health care. Although the program has been proven effective and has a long history of cost-savings, it has been woefully underfunded. This legislation would strengthen the resources for this important program.
- *Contraceptive Coverage for Low-Income Women* - While all private health insurance plans are now required to cover all U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved forms of contraception as part of the ACA's women's preventive benefit that same protection has been extended to Medicaid beneficiaries through regulation. This legislation would extend this requirement to women and their families that are served by Medicaid to ensure coverage equity across programs and cement this coverage into statute.
- *Increase Access to Emergency Contraception* – Emergency contraception (EC) has been available for nearly 40 years. It is a safe and effective method of contraception. EC provides women with a second chance at prevention in case of unanticipated sexual activity, contraceptive failure or sexual assault. This legislation would ensure that hospitals promptly provide factual information about EC survivors of sexual assault and that they are promptly provided with EC upon their request without charge. A related provision would also support campus based sexual assault prevention educational programs and ensure access to EC at institutions of higher education.

Increase Women's Access to Health Care Information

- *Women's Health Ombudsman* - The ACA made great strides to increase women's access to health care services. These services include birth control, breast and cervical cancer screenings, and annual well-woman exams. As of July 2014, 48.5 million women benefit from guaranteed coverage of these additional preventive benefits without cost sharing. However, some insurers are not covering all forms and methods of birth control as required by the ACA. Moreover, there have been numerous attempts to allow insurance companies and employers with personal objections to deny women coverage for all FDA approved contraceptive methods. This legislation will create a new office within HHS entitled the Women's Health Ombudsman that would coordinate with existing entities at HHS who can advocate for women and enforce their right to the best health care services for their needs.
- *Women's Preventive Health Awareness Campaign* - This legislation takes important steps to raise public awareness about the preventive care women need to remain healthy, and it will help deliver on the promise of the groundbreaking women's preventive health provisions in the Affordable Care Act (ACA). This provision will help to ensure women have clear information about the preventive services they need to remain healthy and the landmark preventive health benefits they are entitled to under the ACA.
- *Improve Maternal Mortality Quality of Care and Research* – Recognizing continued disparities in maternal mortality and lack of uniformity on definitions of severe maternal morbidity, the legislation would establish a maternal mortality review to assess factors contributing to maternal mortality. States would be required to establish a State maternal mortality review committee.
- *Improve Information about Reproductive Health Access in the U.S.* - Also in the area of improving information about women's reproductive health care access, the legislation includes a requirement of HHS to study the progress on women's health

every 5 years and to submit a report to Congress. The study requires HHS to look at the impact of state laws restricting access to abortion, geographic areas where access to family planning is limited, and an analysis of maternity related care as well as impact on women's access to health care and contribution in the state's economy.

Women's Health Care Workforce

- *Women's Health Nurse Practitioners* –Nurse practitioners that focus on women's health are critical to ensuring access to comprehensive, primary care across a woman's lifespan. This legislation would establish a three-year grant program for the training of nurse practitioners that specialize in the area of women's health care, helping to ensure a stronger health care workforce for the delivery of women's health care.

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Planned Parenthood is the nation's leading provider and advocate of high-quality, affordable health care for women, men, and young people, as well as the nation's largest provider of sex education. With more than 700 health centers across the country, Planned Parenthood organizations serve all patients with care and compassion, with respect and without judgment. Through health centers, programs in schools and communities, and online resources, Planned Parenthood is a trusted source of reliable health information that allows people to make informed health decisions. We do all this because we care passionately about helping people lead healthier lives.

Source

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