



# The medical and scientific communities stand for abortion access

BY DR. STEPHANIE TEAL, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 05/29/18 03:30 PM EDT

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Last week the Trump administration rolled out a new, deeply concerning proposal designed to cut off access to federal family planning funds for facilities where abortion is performed or where patients may receive referrals to abortion services. This decision has nothing to do with improving health and safety; it is a purely political attack designed to limit access to abortion care.

The consensus within the medical and scientific community is that abortion is safe, according to a new [report](#) from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM). Importantly, the report finds that medically unnecessary regulations, such as the Trump administration's proposed "domestic gag rule," negatively impact the quality of abortion care and harm women.

The report explains that "abortion-specific regulations on the site and nature of care, provider type, provider training and public funding" diminish the effectiveness and quality of care. Moreover, the experts determined that having an abortion has no impact on a person's future fertility, breast cancer risk or likelihood to experience mental health disorders.

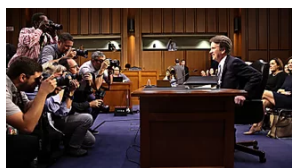
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The domestic gag rule goes against this science-backed conclusion by mandating that providers deny patients information about their sexual and reproductive health options, including abortion. It essentially forces providers to choose between offering abortion services and providing other critical health-care services.

Moreover, the requirement that even an abortion referral would strip away an organization's federal funding goes against every standard of care that ensures clinicians provide their patients information on all available care options.

As a board-certified obstetrician gynecologist, and as the board president of the [Society of Family Planning](#), which is a community of scholars who conduct rigorous abortion and contraception research, it is very concerning that the federal government is forcing medical professionals to withhold information from our patients.

If this gag rule is enacted, it would be devastating for people seeking both abortion care and contraception services around the country. Four million women in the U.S. receive contraceptive care and cancer screenings through Title X, commonly referred to as the federal family planning program, and this gag rule will put politics between providers and millions of patients.

For example, in many rural communities and small towns family planning providers are often the only place a woman can go to access vital reproductive health services. But, since these providers offer a comprehensive range of reproductive health-care services in one facility, they will no longer be eligible for Title X funding and their patients will be denied access to low or no-cost critical health-care services.

All people deserve the highest quality medical care and all available resources to make informed medical choices. But unfortunately, today there are significant barriers to accessing abortion, due to a litany of medically unnecessary state regulations.

Whether it's requirements that only physicians provide care, mandatory facility requirements or unnecessary delays — regulations have resulted in a decline in the number of facilities that perform abortion. In fact, the NASEM report finds that "in 2014, there were 272 abortion clinics in the United States, 17 percent fewer than in 2011." The gag rule would only exacerbate the abortion access crisis we are facing today.

There is widespread agreement within the [medical community](#) that denying family planning funding to organizations that discuss or provide abortion is harmful for women's health — including organizations such as the American College of Physicians (ACP) and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).

Even with the indisputable and credible evidence proving how safe abortion is, anti-abortion activists continue to peddle misinformation about the procedure and seek to limit its availability, with the ultimate goal of cutting off access to abortion care entirely. It's time for state and federal government officials to follow the guidance of the vast consensus of the medical and scientific community and ensure that people can access abortion care, where and when they need it.

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