



## Hurting Not Helping: The Fallacy of the Republican Aim to Defund Planned Parenthood

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**Mona Saleh**, Guest Contributor

The past few months have shown that virtually every GOP candidate is opposed to abortion services on some grounds. This year has been witness to not only a presidential campaign but also a smear campaign against women's health services. Planned Parenthood was, of course, the fitting victim, since this organization somehow finds itself to be scapegoat to anyone opposed to women's health services. With several GOP candidates calling for investigations into their states' Planned Parenthood organizations, it is important to recognize the wide span of services that Planned Parenthood, and clinics like it, provides. In contrast to what the GOP would have you believe, these clinics offer many services separate from abortion and are crucial to the well being of our population, especially for our low-income women.

Planned Parenthood relies on funding from various sources including the Title X Family Planning federal grant, Medicaid, and private fundraising. Title X specifically has been under attack ([http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2015/06/16/house\\_republicans\\_and\\_title\\_x](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2015/06/16/house_republicans_and_title_x)) from Republicans in recent months with frequent threats and moves to defund it. Title X focuses on providing funding to clinics that service low-income or uninsured individuals. Through Title X, clinics such as Planned Parenthood are able to provide contraceptive care—enough to avoid an estimated 1 million pregnancies. (<http://www.hhs.gov/opa/title-x-family-planning/#ii>) In a country where 50% of pregnancies are unplanned, this is a service that cannot be sacrificed.

Further, Title X-funded clinics provide screening for STIs and cervical cancer. That's right—Title X funds cancer screening. So when Jeb Bush (<http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/04/politics/jeb-bush-hillary-clinton-womens-health/>) states, "I'm not sure we need half a billion dollars for women's health issues," it is reasonable that those of us who actually take the time to understand what these clinics do are absolutely infuriated. I'm also not going to invoke the overused point "if this was your mother, sister, or daughter, wouldn't you want good care for her?" The people who utilize these clinics and services are human beings, and I care about them without having to use this age-old patriarchal argument. The most important statistic available here is that

91% of clients that use Title X funded clinics are low-income clients. For this reason, defunding Title X will mean that a disproportionate number of low-income women will be affected, further perpetuating the health disparities that are already too apparent in our society.

But wait...where are all the abortions? Where are all of the abortions that those opposed will never fail to cite as reason to defund these very important programs? Title X specifically stipulates (<http://www.hhs.gov/opa/title-x-family-planning/title-x-policies/statutes-and-regulations/>) “none of the funds appropriated under this title shall be used in programs where abortion is a method of family planning.” Contrary to what many would have us believe, retaining Title X funding or even expanding it would not equal more abortions since due to this very clear stipulation. Therefore, when Republicans propose defunding Title X instead of preventing abortions, they are really putting millions of women’s health at risk with decreased access to contraception, cancer screening, and sex/pregnancy education. Such actions would inadvertently lead to more women having unplanned pregnancies and seeking abortions. Further, if abortions as a service remain under fire and become less and less available, the abortions will still happen, but they will be unsafe. Unsafe abortions can lead to sepsis (severe bacterial infection) and uterine perforation, among other very serious complications if trained professionals in hygienic environments do not perform them.

The more the GOP pushes legal abortion services into a corner, the more women will turn to unsafe abortions to terminate a pregnancy. Clearly, proposals to defund Title X and in turn, Planned Parenthood, have not been completely thought through if the main motivation is to decrease the number of abortions performed.

On this highly divided political stage, I am happy that our Senate recently rejected (<http://thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/senate/254819-senate-rejects-effort-to-defund-planned-parenthood>) a bill that would defund Planned Parenthood. However, the fate of women’s rights should never be left in the hands of decidedly non-medical politicians. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has long supported equal access to abortion services (<http://www.acog.org/Resources-And-Publications/Committee-Opinions/Committee-on-Health-Care-for-Underserved-Women/Increasing-Access-to-Abortion>) to all women, and these are the medical professionals who should be making the decision about abortion access.

It is crucial to recognize that doctors and those aspiring to be doctors go into work only to make the health of our patients better. We are the ones who know our patients’ stories and are able to debunk the stereotypes against women who depend on Title X funded clinics, whether for abortion services or otherwise. Abortion remains a legal choice for women to make, and when a doctor performs an abortion, she is doing so because that is the best option for that specific patient.

*Mona Saleh is a third year student at NYU School of Medicine and a future Ob/Gyn. She is a proud advocate of women’s rights, both reproductive and otherwise. She has been active in educating her peers about topics such as family planning, FGM (female genital mutilation), and women’s representation in the medical field. She graduated from Rutgers University in 2013 with a degree in biology and English.*



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