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STATEWIDE DEFEND TITLE X COALITION DECLARES: NO GAG RULE!

July 17, 2018

Abortion, Birth Control, Health Care, Reproductive Justice, Reproductive Rights, Title X,
Uncategorized

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Today, a statewide coalition representing tens of thousands of patients, providers, and advocates voiced its collective opposition to the Trump administration's proposed Domestic Gag Rule, which would gut the Title X federal family planning program, making it harder for low-income Mainers to access affordable birth control and other reproductive health services.

The proposed rule would:

- Ban federal Title X funds from going to any provider that also provides abortion services;
- Restrict referrals for abortions;
- Eliminate the requirement for nondirective pregnancy options counseling;
- Eliminate the requirement that Title X projects offer the full range of family planning methods;

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Dozens of Maine-based groups and individuals have signed onto a letter decrying the Gag Rule “an affront to our collective values.”

#NOGAGRULE

At a press conference and rally in Augusta, a slate of powerful speakers told the crowd what’s at stake under the proposed Gag Rule.

Dr. Kohar der Simonian, MFP’s medical director, talked about how the proposed rule change would erode trust between provider and patient; while longtime family planning patient Jodi Bolduc, of Livermore, eloquently shared how her visit to Lewiston Family Planning as a teen left her feeling empowered and able to build a family at the time of her choosing.

Maine Family Planning co-founder and former State House Representative Sherry Huber offered a historical perspective, warning that “the Trump Administration’s Gag Rule threatens this effective, bipartisan program and everything my husband and I fought for.”

We heard from PPNNE’s Stephanie Small, NP, who explained how Title X’s broad range of reproductive health services and effective delivery of high-quality care would be undercut by the Gag Rule. And Dr. Sam Zager, a family physician and leader of Maine Providers Standing Up for Health Care, gave us a moving illustration of how Title X is so important for vulnerable patients, like victims of domestic violence.

“The proposed changes to Title X rules would make it harder for Emily and 22,000 other Maine women to have control over their bodies, and the dignity of a system that cares about *them* too,” he said. “The rule changes would further distance vulnerable populations from the full range of family planning services, STD screening and treatment, and cancer screening. These changes

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DEFEND TITLE X COALITION LETTER

The full letter, as well as a list of signatories, is below:

We the undersigned organizations and individuals oppose the Department of Health and Human Services' proposed rule undermining Title X, a critical federal program that provides affordable reproductive and sexual health care to millions of low-income adults and teens across the country.

As a coalition, we collectively represent tens of thousands of patients, providers, and advocates in Maine. We are the experts in our fields, and we share deep concerns about how this proposal would negatively impact health care access and outcomes in our state.

Title X is an effective and essential program that has empowered millions of people to take control of their health and futures. The program supports the provision of birth control, cancer screenings, STD testing and treatment, and other preventive care to more than 22,000 Mainers each year, close to 80 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced-fee services. Nationwide, six in 10 patients say their Title X provider is their regular source of care, and four in 10 have reported it as their only source of care. The program is a driving force behind low unintended pregnancy and teen pregnancy rates.

Despite its demonstrable public health benefits, the Trump administration has put forth a politically motivated plan to gut Title X. This proposed rule change, dubbed the Gag Rule because it forbids referrals for abortion and imposes other limitations on the speech and activities of organizations involved in Title X care, is an affront to our collective values.

The proposal flouts science and medical ethics, interfering with the provider-patient relationship and eliminating the requirement that family planning

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proven contraceptive methods. Furthermore, by prohibiting organizations from providing abortion services and federally funded family planning services at the same location, the rule would endanger the very existence of safety net clinics that provide high-quality reproductive health care in under-served communities.

The administration's plan would place basic reproductive care and family planning increasingly out of reach for poor, rural, under-insured, and uninsured individuals by shuttering clinics across the country, including in Maine. Due to these closures, safe and legal abortion care would be practically inaccessible for anyone except those with the most resources.

Our goal is to keep Mainers healthy and safe. This proposal is unacceptable.

We urge the Department not to sabotage Title X and to reject this and all policies that aren't based in medical need. We are standing together to oppose the Gag Rule and protect Title X and will be submitting our full condemnation of this proposal to HHS during the federal comment period.

Sincerely,

Maine Family Planning
Planned Parenthood of Northern New England
ACLU of Maine
Maine Women's Lobby
Suit Up Maine
Maine Academy of Family Physicians
Maine Providers Standing Up for Health Care
Mabel Wadsworth Feminist Health Center
Maine Transgender Network
Maine Equal Justice Partners
Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights

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Maine People's Alliance
National Council of Jewish Women – Maine Chapter
Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence
Maine Health Equity Alliance
Southern Maine Workers' Center
Mainers for Accountable Leadership
DFD Russell Medical Center
Gubernatorial candidate Janet Mills
Jay Naliboff, MD
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