

Interfaith Statement Opposing Restrictions on Women's Health Care Options April 2011

The undersigned religious, religiously affiliated, and faith-centered organizations and communities represent millions of people of faith committed to women's health and reproductive choices. We are deeply troubled by current legislative efforts to restrict women's access to comprehensive reproductive health care options, including abortion, contraception, HIV/STD testing, cancer screenings, and other essential health services. Legislation currently being debated would curtail access to comprehensive reproductive health care. Current proposals include: the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act (H.R. 3/S. 906), the Protect Life Act (H.R. 358/S. 877), the Title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act (H.R. 217), and other attempts to de-fund the Title X Family Planning program and key implementing organizations. We recognize that issues surrounding women's reproductive choices -- and those regarding abortion in particular -- are complex. Although we come from diverse faith traditions, we all agree that these proposals would have devastating consequences for women and their families, particularly low-income women. **We call on the U.S. Congress and President Obama to reject these intolerable measures.**

As people of faith, the following common principles compel us to speak out together against these proposals:

Striving for social justice and equal rights to health care: Restrictive legislation, like the proposals now moving through Congress (H.R. 3/S. 906, H.R. 217, and H.R. 358/S. 877), would create significant barriers to women's access to reproductive health options and make it harder for women to make their own reproductive choices based on their individual beliefs and consciences. We are especially concerned about efforts to de-fund the Title X Family Planning program and those organizations, such as Planned Parenthood, that serve as a key part of our social safety net. H.R. 217 and other proposals aimed at de-funding these health centers would harm those with few affordable options to obtain basic health care. Title X health centers and clinics are on the public health front lines, serving low-income individuals and other vulnerable populations. These centers help men and women of limited means prevent unintended pregnancies; they promote prevention of, and treatment for HIV and other STDs; they offer life-saving cancer screenings; and they provide crucial medically-accurate information about sexual health. Title X providers ensure that women who want to have children get the information and care they need to promote a healthy pregnancy. As faith-centered organizations, we are committed to the most marginalized and the most vulnerable of our society, especially those with limited financial means or those who live in areas with limited access to services. Reducing health care options for some, based on their economic strata or geographic location, is profoundly unjust.

Respecting women's moral agency: We affirm women as moral agents who have the capacity, right, and responsibility to make their own decisions about sexuality, reproduction, and their families. Legislation that eliminates health coverage for and limits the availability of reproductive health care services through funding restrictions would severely limit a woman's ability to make decisions about her own health care and about how best to care for her family, guided by her own conscience, her personal circumstances, and her own moral or faith tradition.

Valuing compassion and the obligation to protect every woman's health and life: Restrictions on women's health care options endanger women's lives. H.R. 358/S. 877 and H.R. 3/S. 877 would allow hospitals and individual health workers to refuse to provide abortion services to a woman, even when such care is necessary to save her life. We are deeply disturbed by this drastic expansion of so-called "conscience protections," protections that do not include safeguards or recourse for patients seeking care. As people of faith, we strongly believe that a health worker's right to refuse to provide certain services must not infringe on a woman's right to access the health care she needs. Above all, that refusal must not endanger her life. Health professionals and the organizations that support them have an obligation to ensure access to necessary services, whether directly or by referral to an accessible alternative health care provider.

Safeguarding religious liberty: We believe that one person's religious viewpoint must not be imposed on others. Different faiths, and even groups within a single faith community, hold varying views and opinions. Time and again, our nation has answered this diversity of opinions by upholding the founding principle of religious freedom. Reproductive freedoms are integrally bound with religious freedoms—a connection recognized by the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*. Women have a right to

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make reproductive health choices based on their own faith tradition, free from constraints imposed by those seeking to legislate one religious viewpoint or another. These restrictive legislative proposals (H.R. 3/S. 906, H.R. 217, and H.R. 358/S. 877) would erode Americans' constitutionally protected right to religious freedom.

As people of faith, we believe in compassion, justice, and the dignity of all women. We understand that those who would restrict women's access to comprehensive reproductive health care are often motivated by their religious beliefs and seek to impose their views on others. However, freedom of choice means that every woman and man is valued as a moral decision-maker, free to make personal decisions about their reproductive lives based on their own religious beliefs and consciences. We cannot presume to tell others how best to inform and listen to their own consciences as they make decisions about whether and when to have children or how best to care for their families. **Today, and every day, we stand up as people of faith for women's health and reproductive choices—and we urge our government to do the same.**

American Jewish World Service
B'nai Brith International
Catholics for Choice
Central Conference of American Rabbis
Clergy Advisory Board of Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Concerned Clergy for Choice
Episcopal Women's Caucus
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
Institute for Welcoming Resources of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
Jewish Women International
Keshet
Men of Reform Judaism
Muslims for Progressive Values
National Council of Jewish Women
North American Federation of Temple Youth
Rabbinical Assembly
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Religious Institute
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Women of Reform Judaism
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual
Women's Rabbinic Network