

September 28, 2020

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support the “Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act”

To Members of the United States Congress:

The 94 reproductive health, rights and justice organizations signed below are committed to promoting health and human rights in countries throughout the world. On the occasion of September 28th, International Safe Abortion Day, we call upon Members of Congress to end restrictions on abortion in U.S. foreign policy and to repeal the 1973 Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act. We write in support of H.R. 7816, the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, the first-ever legislation to repeal the Helms Amendment and expand abortion access globally. We urge you to co-sponsor this critical legislation led by Representatives Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Nita Lowey (D-NY), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Jackie Speier (D-CA), Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), Diana DeGette (D-CO), and Norma Torres (D-CA) .

Through foreign assistance, the U.S. government plays a powerful role in influencing and improving global health worldwide. But the harmful Helms Amendment prohibits foreign assistance funds from being used “for the performance of abortion as a method of family planning” and has been implemented as a complete ban on the use of U.S. foreign assistance funds for abortion care.

The Helms Amendment is yet another policy deeply rooted in racism. The amendment was introduced by then Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC), who was known for his anti-rights, racist efforts throughout his career. Racial justice and reproductive justice issues are intertwined no matter where a person lives. Historically, Black and brown communities around the globe have been denied both due to colonialism, white supremacy and ideological policies imposed through foreign aid like the Helms Amendment. This harmful policy forces our punitive and medically unnecessary abortion restrictions on international communities, allowing the United States to control the health care and bodily autonomy of millions of Black and brown people around the world. Just like the Hyde Amendment’s restrictions on abortion access in the United States, the Helms Amendment puts reproductive freedom out of reach for people of color. As the United States grapples with racism and barriers to racial justice, the Helms Amendment is another example of how systemic racism is reinforced through policy.

Global progress in sexual and reproductive health and rights requires the elimination of restrictive laws and policies, including barriers to abortion access. Abortion is a common

experience everywhere, with approximately 73 million abortions taking place yearly. People face unintended pregnancy and seek abortion care regardless of the legal and policy context. Pregnant people are more likely to experience risk to physical and mental health—including infection, hemorrhage, internal injury and psychological trauma—when seeking abortion care in places where abortion is restricted by law.

Laws around the world have changed over the past several decades, with governments and advocates successfully liberalizing abortion laws to ensure the health and human rights of pregnant people. Still, in many countries, people who end their pregnancies and individuals who help them face stigma, discrimination, and criminalization. The Helms Amendment perpetuates abortion stigma and runs counter to global consensus and human rights standards that support each person's right to bodily autonomy.

In addition, the Helms Amendment reduces the availability of comprehensive reproductive health care and often results in the censorship of critical information on abortion. Because recipients of U.S. foreign aid cannot use funds for abortion care, the Helms Amendment has limited integration of health care services and isolates abortion from other essential health care services. These barriers have been further exacerbated by the significant expansion of the global gag rule across all U.S. global health assistance.

The U.S. Congress enacted the Helms Amendment in 1973, following decades of successful movements for independence by formerly colonized countries across the world. U.S. laws should not impede access to abortion for people who seek health care from U.S. supported programs. With the current worldwide lockdowns and health systems focusing on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, contraception and abortion are becoming harder to access, particularly for individuals who already face systemic barriers to accessing essential reproductive health care, resulting in poor health outcomes.

The Helms Amendment is imperialistic and denies the human rights of people around the world who want to end their pregnancies. It worsens global health inequity, particularly in the COVID-19 era. We urge Congress to take action to end the Helms Amendment, so that everyone, no matter where they live or how much money they make, can get the health care they want and need, including an abortion, with dignity.

Sincerely,

Abortion Care Network
Advocates for Youth
Alliance for Justice

American Jewish World Service
American Medical Student Association
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
Amnesty International USA
Black Women's Health Imperative
Catholics for Choice
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for International Policy
Center for Reproductive Rights
CHANGE (Center for Health and Gender Equity)
Civil Liberties & Public Policy
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR)
Council for Global Equality
Creative Community League
Desiree Alliance
End Rape On Campus
Feminist Majority
Freedom Network USA
Global Fund for Women
Global Justice Center
Global Justice Institute
Global Network of Black People working in HIV
Guttmacher Institute
Health GAP
HIPS
Human Rights Campaign
Ibis Reproductive Health
If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law
International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
International Women's Health Coalition
Ipas

Jewish Women International
Lift
MADRE
Medical Students for Choice
Metrics for Management
MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health and Rights
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Abortion Federation
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Birth Equity Collaborative
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Council of Jewish Women
National Health Law Program
National Institute for Reproductive Health
National Network of Abortion Funds
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women's Health Network
National Women's Law Center
North American Society of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology (NASPAG)
Nurses for Sexual and Reproductive Health
OutRight Action International
PAI
People For the American Way
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Population Connection Action Fund
Population Institute
Positive Women's Network-USA
Promundo-US
Provide
Rabbinical Assembly
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

Reproductive Health Access Project
SIECUS
SisterLove, Inc.
SisterReach
SisterSong: National Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
SlutwalkNOLA.org
Society for Humanistic Judaism
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Tewa Women United
The Center for Sexual Pleasure and Health
The Global Justice Institute
The Womxn Project (TWP)
Treatment Action Group
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
We Testify
White Ribbon Alliance Global Secretariat
Women Graduates USA
Women of Reform Judaism
Women's Information Network
Women's Medical Fund
Woodhull Freedom Foundation