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Contacts:

Emma Thomas, Emma.thomas@berlinrosen.com

Dismantling racist laws and policies that deny people access to essential abortion services

Rep. Jan Schakowsky reintroduces the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act to expand abortion access globally by repealing the Helms Amendment, which bars U.S. foreign assistance funding for abortion

WASHINGTON – Today, Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), a Senior Chief Deputy Whip and Chair of the Providers and Clinics Task Force for the Congressional Pro-Choice Caucus, reintroduced the [Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act](#). This historic legislation would repeal the Helms Amendment, an archaic and racist policy that essentially bans the use of any U.S. foreign assistance funds for abortion services overseas. The bill is co-led by Barbara Lee (D-CA), Jackie Speier (D-CA), Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), Diana DeGette (D-CO), Norma Torres (D-CA) and Marilyn Strickland (D-WA) and is backed by over 140 original cosponsors.

The Helms Amendment is a policy rooted in racism and colonialism. For the past 48 years, it has oppressed and controlled the bodies of Black and brown women using the power of U.S. funding.

People living in low- and middle-income countries continue to suffer under this harmful amendment. They are denied access to the health care they need, even in cases of rape, incest, and life endangerment. Each year [35 million unsafe abortions](#) occur in low- and middle-income countries, resulting in tens of thousands of preventable deaths and injuries. Through the Helms amendment, the U.S. tacitly contributes to this crisis, and it is long past time for the U.S. to support safe abortion services.

“Since 1973, the Helms Amendment has prohibited any U.S. foreign aid from being used for ‘the performance of abortion as a method of family planning,’ said **Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)**. “In practice, Helms has banned all U.S. foreign assistance funds from being used for any abortion care. As the largest government funder of global health, including family planning and reproductive health services, the United States should be stepping up and doing everything we can to prevent negative maternal health outcomes. But instead, we have archaic language that creates an arbitrary line between abortion and all other health-care services, limiting access to critical care, particularly in the Global South. It is plain wrong for the United States to force a health-care provider in another country to choose between limiting the care they can give to patients and keeping critical funding. Doctors pledge to do no harm.”

A new analysis from the [Guttmacher Institute](#) estimates that, if the Helms Amendment were repealed and U.S. support helped ensure that all abortions were provided safely in the countries

where abortion is legal on at least some grounds and where the United States is already supporting family planning programs, there would be approximately 19 million fewer unsafe abortions and 17,000 fewer maternal deaths each year.

The Biden-Harris Administration has taken positive steps to advance the sexual and reproductive health and rights of people everywhere but there is more to be done. Rescinding the Global Gag Rule on January 28 in the President's memorandum on "Protecting Women's Health At Home and Abroad" was the tip of the iceberg and just the start of what is needed from the White House and Congress to end the long tradition of harmful U.S. policies. Repealing the Helms Amendment is a critical step toward achieving reproductive and economic freedom and equity for millions worldwide.

The *Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act* is supported and endorsed by a diverse coalition of more than 170 organizations.

Quotes from several of the groups that endorse the *Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act* can be found below for inclusion in media coverage.

More information can be found at repealhelms.org. A recording from today's press conference to reintroduce the *Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act* can be found [here](#).

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Quotes from Endorsing Organizations

Anu Kumar, President and CEO, Ipas

Racial justice and reproductive justice are intertwined. Black and brown communities around the world have been, and continue to be, harmed by colonialism, white supremacy and ideological U.S. policies like the Helms Amendment.

It is time for the U.S. to join the global community to support and defend reproductive justice, instead of undermining human rights and continuing harmful policies that deny millions of people access to essential health care services they want and need.

Repealing the Helms Amendment would lift 48 years of repression and expand access to life-saving abortion care for people around the world. This policy does nothing other than stigmatize a health procedure and the people who need it.

Serra Sippel, President, CHANGE

The Abortion is Healthcare Everywhere Act is a critical step in dismantling neo-colonialism and racism in our U.S. foreign policy. For more than 45 years, as countries have lifted their own restrictions on abortion and prioritized the health and rights of women and girls, the Helms Amendment has dragged their progress backwards. It's long past time for the U.S. to stop undermining efforts by countries and advocates to make safe abortion accessible to those who need it.

Repealing the Helms Amendment is a matter of life or death for women, girls, families, and LGBTQIA+ communities around the world. Ending Helms would prevent millions of unsafe

and illegal abortions and millions of subsequent injuries and disabilities, and would sharply decrease maternal deaths and pregnancy-related complications for women internationally. Moreover, removing Helms would serve as an opportunity for the United States to play catch-up when it comes to its leadership in the realm of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

People all over the world cannot afford for the U.S. government to turn its back on them. We look to Congress to pass the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act and repeal the Helms Amendment immediately.

Rori Kramer, Director of US Advocacy, American Jewish World Service

For far too long, the Helms Amendment has harmed the sexual and reproductive health and rights of individuals across the world. Today, the United States comes one step closer to realizing a world where everyone - regardless of who they are, whom they love, or where they live - is able to access abortion services that they want and need.

We are grateful for the leadership of Congresswoman Schakowsky and her colleagues in unequivocally stating that abortion is health care and a human right. Now, we must pass the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act to achieve a more just future for all.

Jamie L. Manson, President, Catholics for Choice

Catholics for Choice is proud to stand with moral leaders like Rep. Jan Schakowsky to right the wrong of the Helms Amendment, an affront to our values as Americans and as Catholics—freedom of speech, freedom of religion and the Catholic call to care for the marginalized of society.

For more than four decades, the Helms Amendment has endangered the lives of the most vulnerable people in the world— depriving them of both moral autonomy and basic reproductive health care. It is unconscionable for this dangerous and unjust policy to continue. Congress should pass the Abortion is Healthcare Everywhere Act now!

Dr. Herminia Palacio, President and CEO, Guttmacher Institute

The U.S. government can and must show global leadership in safeguarding reproductive health and rights. This is true especially with the COVID-19 crisis threatening the health of women and families across the world—including potentially a significant increase in unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortion. U.S. leadership includes repealing the harmful Helms amendment through the Abortion Is Health Care Everywhere Act.

The Helms amendment is a deeply unjust and discriminatory policy that in effect prohibits the use of U.S. global health assistance to support for safe abortion services abroad. Like other abortion restrictions, this funding ban most harshly impacts people with the fewest resources, including those who have low incomes, are young, or live in rural areas.

The evidence is clear and irrefutable: Abortion is an experience shared by millions of people worldwide, both in countries where abortion is highly restricted and where it is broadly legal. Our urgent call to action for policymakers is that they must recognize the basic human right of all people to decide freely whether and when to be pregnant.

**Dr. Chimaraoke Izugbara, Director of Global Health, Youth and Development,
International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)**

The International Center for Research on Women applauds the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, which calls for the repeal of the Helms Amendment. Our research shows that bodily autonomy underpins greater health, financial security and empowerment in decision-making and participation in social and political life—particularly for women and girls. While President Biden’s reversal of the Global Gag rule represents a new beginning for sexual and reproductive health care and rights, more must be done to counter the harms done over the past four years and ensure reproductive justice for people of all genders that is long lasting. This is why we are incredibly supportive of this step that Rep. Jan Schakowsky and all the other co-sponsors are taking with this bill.

Ilyse Hogue, President, NARAL Pro-Choice America

The Helms Amendment has blocked access to critical reproductive healthcare for people around the world for more than four decades. This harmful policy puts their lives at risk and especially harms LGBTQI+ and black and brown communities.

We’re experiencing an unprecedented global public health crisis and it is more urgent than ever that Congress pass the Abortion is Healthcare Everywhere Act to repeal the Helms Amendment and ensure U.S. global assistance funding supports comprehensive reproductive healthcare—including abortion care.

Nabeeha Kazi Hutchins, President and CEO, PAI

No matter where you live, you should be able to make reproductive health care decisions that align with your needs and aspirations. The Helms amendment denies this right to reproductive freedom and undermines community-led efforts to expand access to safe abortion care and support.

This policy also fundamentally discriminates against Black, Brown and Indigenous people around the world who are seeking abortion services. With today’s reintroduction of the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, our congressional champions have led the way toward repealing the Helms amendment for good.

We now call upon the Biden-Harris administration to join us in supporting this urgent legislation that is key to achieving global sexual and reproductive health equity and justice.

Brian Dixon, Sr. Vice President, Population Connection Action Fund

For nearly 50 years, the Helms Amendment has made life harder for hundreds of millions of people around the world. It’s bad health policy. It’s bad foreign policy. It’s a disgraceful relic of a right-wing agenda that is utterly divorced from the reality of the lives of the people it hurts, and it is long past time for its repeal. We’re proud to endorse this important bill and are excited to help it pass into law.

Nicole Cheetham, International Youth Health and Rights Director, Advocates for Youth

Around the world, young people in need of abortion services face many challenges to accessing care, including legal barriers, lack of access to affordable services, long travel

distances, and stigma. The Helms Amendment and its interpretation exacerbate these challenges by forbidding the use of foreign assistance funds for abortion, even in countries where legal. Such restrictions to services are harmful and put young people at risk because they may not be able to access the services that they need. The *Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act* is a crucial step toward ensuring that young people have access to comprehensive reproductive health care services, including the provision of abortion services. Abortion access is fundamental to ensuring young people's autonomy, health, and ability to plan for their future. U.S. foreign assistance should contribute to improving the sexual and reproductive health of young people and reducing maternal mortality and morbidity, not create added barriers that harm their health and well-being.

Dr. Ali Bokhari, President, American Medical Student Association

The American Medical Student Association believes that all women, regardless of age, social status or marital status have the right to obtain a legal, safe, voluntary abortion. We oppose any policies that implicitly or explicitly prohibit the inclusion of abortion counseling or services in any family planning clinics or counseling services. That is why we support efforts to repeal the Helms Amendment and support the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act.

Rachel Wilson, Founder, Catalysts for Change

For far too long, women have been denied the information and services they want and need. It is time to rectify this wrong, once and for all.

Kelley Dennings, Campaigner, Center for Biological Diversity

Universal access to abortion as part of reproductive healthcare is a basic human right. All of us should have agency over our bodies and our decisions about whether — and when — to have children.

When safe, legal abortion is restricted, either in the United States or elsewhere in the world, it endangers patients and limits the ability of people to receive comprehensive medical services, make informed healthcare decisions and choose when to start a family.

Now is the time to repeal the Helms Amendment.

Elise Bryant, President, Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW)

The Coalition of Labor Union Women is a staunch supporter of reproductive rights for all women in the United States and around the world. Every woman, regardless of geographical place, must have the right to plan a family, use contraceptives and access to a safe, affordable abortion.

We call on our government to pass the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act now. The Helms provision needs to be repealed and replaced with language that allows women around the world access to quality reproductive health care.

The CLUW is a proud supporter of reproduction rights for all women. We believe a woman's right to safe and affordable abortions is a human right. We stand all with all those who support that right!

Karla Gonzales Garcia, Policy Director, COLOR

The Helms Amendment exports political attacks on bodily autonomy and harms women and girls around the world. We will never remain silent when the state or politicians try to control our reproduction, how we build our families or the decisions we make about our bodies and our lives.

Barbara Weinstein, Director, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of *kavod ha'briyot*, or respect for individual dignity. The Helms Amendment violates this core value by limiting abortion access for the most vulnerable and perpetuating inequality in global health care.

We are proud to endorse the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, which would remove the Helms Amendment from statute and expand access to comprehensive reproductive health care worldwide.

Andrew Spieldenner, Ph.D., Executive Director, MPact: Global Action for Gay Men's Health & Rights

There is much work to be done to advance the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and LGBTI people worldwide, including trans men and nonbinary people. That is why MPact is proud to endorse the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act. For too long, the politicization of reproductive health programs has endangered lives, undermined the work of healthcare professionals, and created chaos among our global communities. MPact echoes calls from our partners around the world to advocate for access to affordable, high quality, and stigma-free sexual and reproductive health services for all.

Dr. Beverly Winikoff, Gynuity Health Projects

Gynuity Health Projects applauds the introduction of the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act which would recognize safe abortion care as a critical component of comprehensive health care. The passage of the legislation could not be more urgent while the COVID-19 pandemic surges on and access to care is ever more precarious. New technologies such as medical abortion delivered via telemedicine and a strong evidence base for self-care interventions are promising ways to increase access to safe abortion care. Congress must pass this critical legislation.

Andrea Carlise, Executive Director, International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law (IANGEL)

Repealing the harmful Helms Amendment and replacing it with proactive language stating that U.S. funding shall be used to provide comprehensive reproductive health-care services and information, including abortion services, training, and equipment is long overdue. For far too long, the Helms Amendment has prevented the U.S. from championing gender equity globally by preventing women and girls from making their own decisions about when and whether to have children. Congress has the opportunity to advance equality by passing the Abortion is Healthcare Everywhere Act. Our government must value lives over politics and equality over patriarchal and oppressive policies.

Marcela Howell, President & CEO, In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda

The Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act is an important step in reversing restrictive policies that limit access to the full spectrum of reproductive health care. Like the Hyde amendment, the Helms Act disproportionately and negatively impacts Black women, femmes, and girls by limiting their ability to make autonomous decisions about their lives and families.

In Our Own Voice applauds the introduction of the Abortion is Health Care Act. The Helms Act is an anti-human rights policy and its repeal is long overdue. Women and pregnant people across the globe should have the ability to make the best choices for themselves and their families, without political interference.

Shannon Kowalski, Director of Advocacy and Policy, International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)

For more than 47 years the Helms Amendment, a racist and colonial relic, has denied pregnant people abroad their right to make decisions about their own health and lives. It has intentionally and unfairly limited access to safe and legal abortion services, costing some their lives.

It's time for people worldwide to be able to access comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services without interference from the US Government. The Abortion Is Health Care Everywhere Act is an important and long-overdue step forward that will further US leadership on global health and human rights and will have a significant impact on the lives of women and girls worldwide.

Fawn Bolak, Co-Founder, Keep Abortion Safe

It is long past time for the U.S. to support safe abortion services and repeal the Helms amendment. Safe abortion and contraception saves lives and allows people and families to thrive with dignity. Keep Abortion Safe proudly and enthusiastically supports the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, which repeals the Helms Amendment, a harmful and oppressive piece of legislation that denies people access to reproductive freedom across the world.

Sneha Shah, Litigation Counsel, The Lawyering Project

The Helms Amendment is a racist and sexist policy which undermines the health and dignity of primarily Black and brown people across the globe and violates the fundamental principle of health care as a human right. Abortion is health care and the Lawyering Project is proud to support the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act.

Marjorie Newman-Williams, President, MSI United States

The Helms Amendment harms women and girls around the world, denying them access to life-changing and life-saving reproductive healthcare.

MSI applauds the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act. The repeal of the Helms Amendment is long overdue to ensure that every woman, everywhere can control her own body and future. Let's get the politics out of women's reproductive healthcare!

The Very Reverend Katherine Hancock Ragsdale, President and CEO, National Abortion

Federation

The Helms Amendment is a harmful and discriminatory policy that undermines U.S. foreign assistance programs and targets vulnerable communities that already have difficulty accessing basic health care. The end of this amendment is long overdue, and it is time that legislators repeal it once and for all. Abortion is essential health care, and U.S. politicians should not be making health care decision for others around the world. We support the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act and we will continue to fight for safe and affordable access to abortion around the world.

Christian F. Nunes, President, National Organization for Women

Congress has the opportunity to adopt the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act that would repeal the harmful Helms Amendment, passed 47 years ago to deny aid to tens of millions of women overseas who have abortions in unsafe conditions each year.

Thousands of people die or experience serious injuries and complications; many are persons of color in poverty-impacted communities. The United States must stand for racial and reproductive justice for all persons and help assure access to safe abortion care – everywhere!

Executive Committee of the Board of Directors, North American Men Engage Network (NAMEN)

In January 1973, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Roe v. Wade* that the U.S. Constitution protects a pregnant women's right to have an abortion without excessive government restriction. Later in the same year, the Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act was passed by the U.S. Congress, stating "no foreign assistance funds may be used to pay for the performance of abortion as a method of family planning or to motivate or coerce any person to practice abortions." Despite this narrow text, the Helms Amendment is applied as a **total ban** on abortion services, training and equipment and even in cases of rape, incest and life endangerment.

This legislation upholds white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, and xenophobic contradictions mirroring the beliefs of Jesse Helms, the late North Carolina senator who authored this amendment and mirrors the cancerous actions of many in the current Congress.

As with many other archaic vestiges of law, it is time to repeal the Helms Amendment to provide access to reproductive health and basic human rights for all.

Dr. Geri Hewitt, President, North American Society of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology (NASPAG)

The mission of NASPAG is to advocate for the reproductive well-being of children and adolescents and the provision of unrestricted, unbiased and evidence based practice of pediatric and adolescent gynecology. Reproductive health care, including access to abortion, empowers young women by permitting the opportunity to delay pregnancy and complete their physical and mental growth and development. Having choice about planning a family can also be particularly important for those girls who may be at increased risk of health problems and death from early childbearing. Access to abortion care also gives girls and

women the opportunity to complete their education and to pursue and fulfill their career goals.

The Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act is a global opportunity to promote the autonomy, success and optimize health for all patients and their families. We endorse and support the Abortion is Healthcare Everywhere Act.

Ben Jealous, President, People For the American Way

The United States provides health care aid in parts of the world where international assistance is critically needed. It is essential that this aid go to supporting the full spectrum of safe reproductive health care, including abortion care. For nearly five decades, the Helms Amendment has not only hampered our ability to support safe care, it has done harm by allowing unsafe practices to flourish.

Today, with the Biden administration taking early action to reaffirm abortion as a human right, we once again call for passage of the Abortion Is Healthcare Everywhere Act. By permanently repealing Helms, this legislation appropriately puts gender equity, medical science, and human rights at the forefront of our foreign assistance priorities.

Alexis McGill Johnson, President and CEO, Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Abortion is essential health care, period. The Helms Amendment cruelly stands between people around the globe and the respect and services they need. It has always been a coercive policy, pushing the extreme ideology of a vocal minority in the U.S. on people in many of the lowest-income countries in the world — people in need of health care. The policy is a stark example of neocolonialism, taking advantage of the uneven relationship between the U.S. and the countries that receive aid. We thank Rep. Schakowsky and her fellow congressional health care champions for introducing this critical legislation to clearly declare: Now is the time to end the Helms Amendment.

Rabbi Elyse Wechterman, Executive Director, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Human dignity - *Kavod haBriyot*- in the Jewish tradition requires access to the full range of medical care options for all people. Limiting abortion access denies women and pregnant individuals of their dignity and the ability to make safe medical choices for themselves and their families.

The Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, which would remove the Helms Amendment from statute and expand access to comprehensive reproductive health care worldwide, reinstates this dignity and makes it clear that abortion access **is** health care access.

Rev. Katey Zeh, CEO, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

No matter where one lives, access to comprehensive reproductive health care and family planning measures—including abortion—is one of the most powerful determining factors in level of education, economic security, health, and overall quality of life. For nearly five decades, the Helms Amendment has worked to block people around the globe from receiving this essential care.

We see this as an ongoing example of U.S. white patriarchal Christian imperialism and a direct attack on religious liberty and individual rights, health, and dignity. People across faith

traditions all over the world seek abortion care, and we each possess the sacred human right to exercise our own moral conscience in making decisions about our bodies. The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice is honored to be part of the efforts to support the *Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act* and bring an end to the unjust Helms Amendment.

Monica Simpson, Executive Director, SisterSong: National Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective

We have seen the harm and indignity caused by policies designed to limit or interfere with our ability to control our own bodies and futures.

We trust women of color to manage our health and plan our families. We will never stop fighting for the rights and liberation of women and girls around the world. We are in this for the liberation of our people.

That is why we are proud to speak out to get rid of the Helms Amendment and any law or policy imposing the will of the state on our decisions about our lives.

Anne Timmons-Harris, Founder, SlutwalkNOLA.org

Assaulting women's healthcare poses an existential threat to all of humanity.

Statement from Shaunna Thomas, Executive Director and Co-Founder, UltraViolet

Bodily autonomy and access to reproductive healthcare is the foundation of a better future for women, communities of color, LGBTQ+ people, young people, and people with low incomes," said Shaunna Thomas, Executive Director and Co-Founder of UltraViolet. "As the world works to rebuild from the devastation of this pandemic, an economic crisis, and centuries of systemic racism, we must continue to cement these rights and dismantle the policies implemented by men like Donald Trump to deny the world's most vulnerable communities the right to abortion and other critical forms of reproductive healthcare in the US and abroad. The administration must move with the urgency this moment requires to ensure access to abortion and reproductive health care for all against mounting threats both in the US and abroad. Critically, we need President Biden to make good on his campaign promise and take a strong stance against the Helms Amendment and for Congress to work to pass the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act.

Betsy McCallon, CEO, White Ribbon Alliance

Girls and women must be in the driver's seat of their own healthcare, making decisions that are the best for them and their families. Supporting the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act expands access to comprehensive health care services that women want and deserve and removes the punitive Helms amendment that has put millions of women's lives in jeopardy. We stand with our partners for reproductive justice for everyone, everywhere.

Jocelyn Foye, Director, The Womxn Project

There is a dangerous and calculated agenda to take away all access to abortion. Whether it is abortion bans pushed through the US or the harmful policies we export across the globe, politicians are trying to deny us the agency and autonomy in our own reproductive lives. And like other political games, these policies fall hardest on marginalized communities who

already struggle to get healthcare. We are proud to work with our partners to get rid of the Helms Amendment and take on any attempt to take away our most personal decisions.

Ashley Brink, Board Member, Women's Lobby of Colorado

Dangerous policies like the Helms Amendment continue to harm real people and communities globally. It stigmatizes abortion access and contributes to millions of unsafe abortions each year. We must do better by passing the Abortion Is Healthcare Everywhere Act. People deserve access to abortion care, regardless of where they live in the world.

Rabbi Marla Feldman, Executive Director, Women of Reform Judaism

Women of Reform Judaism strongly believes that people everywhere should have access to the full range of reproductive health care, including safe abortion services. Therefore, we support the *Abortion Is Health Care Everywhere Act* to repeal the archaic and punitive Helms Amendment, which has restricted access to critical reproductive health care services, including abortion, for far too long. We are inspired by Jewish values which lead us to advocate for women's health, individual dignity, and moral agency for all individuals.