

Abortion is Health Care Everywhere: Ensuring access to abortion services for millions of people globally

The Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act would repeal the Helms Amendment, which bars U.S. foreign assistance funding for abortion, and therefore expand abortion access globally

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WASHINGTON, DC – Senator Cory Booker today introduced the [Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act](#). This is the first-ever legislation to repeal the Helms Amendment, a 50-year-old policy that bans the use of United States foreign assistance for abortion, putting an arbitrary line between abortion care and all other global health services.

Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Tina Smith (D-MN) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) also lead this critical legislation, which has 21 original cosponsors.

Sen. Booker introduced the proposed legislation with bill co-leads earlier today.

“We know that in the wake of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health*, Americans will be denied access to essential health care services across the United States; however, the repercussions also go beyond our borders. This disastrous decision will be felt around the world, setting back many countries who have long used *Roe v. Wade* as the basis to strengthen abortion rights protections in their own countries. We must take immediate action to mitigate the global impact of this decision,” **said Sen. Booker**. “For that reason, I am proud to introduce the *Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act*, which will repeal the Helms Amendment and ensure that U.S. foreign assistance can be used for safe abortion services overseas.”

Enacted in 1973, the Helms Amendment is found in the Foreign Assistance Act and has been passed as part of Congressional appropriations bills every year for nearly five decades. It is an antiquated, neo-colonialist policy that has, for nearly 50 years, curbed global reproductive and economic freedom around the world.

The policy prohibits U.S. foreign aid from being used for ‘the performance of abortion as a method of family planning.’ But in practice, Helms has banned all U.S. foreign assistance funds from being used for **any** abortion care. This policy exacerbates existing health disparities; and denies millions of mostly Black and brown people in low-to-middle income countries the care they need and want.

“I am proud to lead the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act in the House, the first-ever legislation to repeal the racist 49-year-old Helms Amendment. This harmful policy bars US Foreign Assistance from being used to offer abortion care, even in countries where abortion is legal. That is wrong. The United States should not be standing in the way of healthcare in other countries,” **said Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky**. “Now, for the first time in history,

this legislation is being introduced in the U.S. Senate. I am grateful for Senator Booker's leadership to repeal the Helms Amendment and expand abortion access in this critical moment. Abortion is health care, and health care is a human right."

The *Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act* is an opportunity for the U.S. to fulfil its commitment to protecting and promoting the reproductive health and rights of people living overseas. There is no doubt the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* will not only deny millions of people living in the U.S. their fundamental rights to health care, to bodily autonomy, and to freedom, but it will also have a ripple effect around the world. Introducing the *Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act in the Senate* is an opportunity for Congress to address negative global impacts of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* decision, by protecting and promoting the reproductive health and rights of people living overseas.

A broad coalition of global reproductive health, rights and justice advocacy, research, and service-delivery organizations celebrates this historic introduction today. This group has been working to mitigate and address the harms caused by the Helms Amendment for over a decade. Additionally, the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act is endorsed by more than 180 organizations and quotes from several groups can be found below for inclusion in media coverage.

More information can be found at repealhelms.org.

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Iffath Abbasi Hoskins, MD, FACOG, president of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)

Following the catastrophic decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, it is more important than ever that the United States promote the right to comprehensive, evidence-based medical care, including abortion, here and around the world. ACOG applauds Senator Booker for introducing the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act as our international partners turn to Congress for leadership as they witness the erosion of women's rights on our own soil. This legislation is a bold step forward in the fight for global reproductive freedom and access to lifesaving care.

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.

Nadya Dutchin, Executive Director, American Humanist Association

Humanists affirm that everyone, everywhere should be able to obtain a safe abortion and have the resources they need to access comprehensive reproductive health care; shamefully, however, the Helms amendment has stood in the way of many in the international community who seek such care and prosperity. *The Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act* rightfully seeks to fix injustice in U.S. foreign assistance policy by making resources available that ensure abortions are safe and accessible, particularly to those who are most marginalized and need family planning services, and the American Humanist Association is proud to endorse this legislation for putting humanitarianism and health first.

Christy Turlington Burns, Founder, Every Mother Counts

Access to abortion care is central to the health and human rights of women and pregnant people, both in the United States and globally. Globally, unsafe abortion, which results from barriers to accessing safe, respectful abortion care, is a leading cause of maternal deaths and complications. Every Mother Counts supports the Abortion is Healthcare Everywhere Act, which would repeal the Helms Amendment, a harmful abortion restriction that keeps maternal and reproductive health care, including abortion care, out of reach for people around the world, and prevents pregnant people and mothers from making decisions about whether, when, and how to give birth.

Giselle Carino, CEO of Fòs Feminista, for the statement you're preparing:

“The repeal of Helms Amendment, which violates the basic right to self-determination, is long overdue. The U.S. must stop curtailing the life projects of Global South women, girls and people who can become pregnant. In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, this is a key moment for global solidarity on advancing abortion rights and in particular to provide information, medication, and support to women and other pregnant people for self-managing an abortion. Feminist activism and movement building across the Global South are bringing about positive change, from the Green Wave in Latin America that successfully pressed for decriminalization of abortion in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico, to the recent victories to dismantle colonial-area criminalization laws in Benin, Kenya and Sierra Leone. Now is the time to strengthen transnational connections to secure hard-won rights, hold governments accountable, and advance decriminalization of abortion in laws, policies, and social norms.”

Dr. Herminia Palacio, president and CEO, Guttmacher Institute

Congress still has the opportunity to demonstrate with actions the US government's commitment to global healthcare equity and women's rights by repealing the harmful Helms amendment and passing the Abortion Is Health Care Everywhere Act. The Helms amendment is a deeply unjust and discriminatory policy that prohibits health care organizations abroad from using US global health assistance funds to support safe abortion services. 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 places where abortion is highly restricted and where it is broadly legal. We urge Congress to recognize the basic human right of all people to decide freely whether and when to be pregnant, and whether and when to bear children.

Peggy Clark, President and CEO, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

The International Center for Research on Women applauds the Senate introduction of the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, repealing the Helms Amendment. For over four decades, the Helms Amendment has limited access to essential sexual and reproductive health services worldwide by restricting funding for abortion care. Abortion is an essential health care service and should be upheld as such, and access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and wellness services is a human right. Our research shows that people of all genders who have bodily autonomy are healthier, are more financially secure and are more empowered in their decision-making and participation in social and political life. So we are thankful to the sponsors and co-sponsors of this bill to moving the U.S. one step closer to removing restrictions on foreign assistance so that it can fully support comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights and enable people that get pregnant to have healthier lives with their human rights respected.

Anu Kumar, Ipas President and CEO

Abortion is health care. Everyone, no matter who, no matter where, must have access. When people don't have access to abortion, they face greater economic struggles, their children have fewer resources; women, pregnant people and providers can go to jail; many people are forced to carry unwanted pregnancies to term; and being pregnant and giving birth is riskier than having an abortion. Everyone has less freedom.

For the last 50 years, the Helms Amendment has denied people—in low-to-middle income countries—their reproductive rights and the care they want and need. This neo-colonialist policy has played politics with people's lives in countries thousands of miles away. And now we see the same thing happening in the US.

The time to act is now. Passing the Abortion is Healthcare Everywhere Act would save the lives of millions of people around the world. This would move us closer to a vision of

reproductive justice and a world where everyone can make their own decisions about their future and health with dignity and respect.

Macarena Sáez, Executive Director, Women's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch (HRW)

“Reproductive rights are human rights. This means that access to reproductive health, including access to abortion services, should be guaranteed to women and pregnant people throughout the United States. We’ve extensively documented how abortion bans across the globe increase unsafe abortion, leading to higher maternal mortality and morbidity rates. The Helms Amendment goes against Human Rights Watch’s consistent and yearslong evidence that accessible and safe abortion is essential to protect the rights to life, health, and privacy, among others”.

Mini Timmaraju, President, NARAL Pro-Choice America

“For more than four decades, the Helms Amendment has blocked access to abortion care for people around the world. That is, simply put, unacceptable. As anti-choice extremists wage attack after attack on abortion rights in our country, the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act reaffirms our commitment to reproductive freedom for everybody – here and around the world. We applaud Sen. Booker for introducing the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act and his commitment to ensuring that communities across the globe have the freedom to make their own decisions about their lives, families, and futures.”

Jody Rabhan, Chief Policy Officer, National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)

“At the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), we know that abortion is safe, essential, time-sensitive health care and that health care is a basic human right. Our Jewish values teach us that every single person’s health is unassailable and that all deserve fair treatment and access to the resources necessary to make their own decisions about abortion without political interference or economic coercion. The Helms Amendment has long turned this principle on its head, denying care to millions of individuals around the world and hindering the exercise of their fundamental reproductive rights by blocking use of U.S. foreign assistance funds for abortions services. NCJW is proud to endorse the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act to repeal this dangerous policy and to support access to high-quality, comprehensive reproductive health care services worldwide.”

Rabbi Elyse Wechterman, Executive Director, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

“Abortion and access to reproductive medicine is healthcare. And access to healthcare is a fundamental human right, something we all must do our part to provide and guarantee if we are to live up to the teaching that all people are created in God’s image. All people must be afforded the dignity, honor and basic needs to live healthy and whole lives. And abortion care is a central comment of a dignified human life.”

Christian F. Nunes, President, National Organization for Women (NOW)

The National Organization for Women fully supports the Abortion is Healthcare Everywhere Act and calls on Congress to swiftly pass this critical legislation. The Helms Amendment is an antiquated, blatantly racist policy that puts the world's most vulnerable women at risk by denying them the reproductive health services they so desperately need. This cruel and arbitrary amendment prevents women – particularly Black and Brown women - from becoming leaders in their communities and uplifting economies, leaving them with few options. The United States has long positioned itself as a global leader that fosters equity and equality across borders; the Abortion is Healthcare Everywhere Act will help restore our commitment to advancing gender equality around the world.

Rev. Katey Zeh, CEO, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC)

“No matter where someone lives, access to comprehensive reproductive health care and family planning measures—including abortion—is one of the most powerful determining factors in their 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 (RCRC) 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, and we thank Senator Hirono for leading this much-needed bill.”

Nabeeha Kazi Hutchins, President & CEO, PAI

“Globally, at least 35 million women have abortions in unsafe conditions every year. Unsafe abortion is a leading cause of maternal mortality and morbidity in low- and middle-income countries where there are significant barriers to accessing quality abortion care.

“Restrictive U.S. foreign policies like the Helms amendment create an added burden and undermine country-led efforts to meet the needs of their own communities, reduce maternal mortality and bolster reproductive rights. As the largest donor of global health assistance, the U.S. government is compounding health inequities and amplifying a policy that harms people and their communities.

“The Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, which permanently repeals the Helms amendment, would result in at least 19 million fewer unsafe abortions annually, leading to

17,000 fewer maternal deaths and 12 million fewer women needing medical treatment for complications from unsafe procedures. We welcome its introduction in the Senate and urge its swift passage through Congress so that U.S. policy is guided by science, embraces human rights and the autonomy and agency of all people and aligns with global public health institutions that recognize abortion as essential health care.”

Alexis McGill Johnson, president and CEO, Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA)

“Ending the Helms Amendment is a powerful step toward ensuring that U.S. foreign policy expands access to quality, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care services beyond its borders, including abortion. For far too long, the Helms Amendment has denied people of their reproductive rights, kept them from the essential health care they want and need, and reduced the availability of safe, legal abortion. It’s a coercive policy that forces the extreme ideology of a vocal minority in the U.S. on people in many of the lowest-income countries in the world. The policy is a stark example of neocolonialism and deeply rooted in white supremacy, designed to take advantage of the uneven relationship between the U.S. and the countries that receive aid.

“We thank Senators Booker, Duckworth, Hirono, Blumenthal, and Smith for introducing this critical legislation as an important step to protecting abortion access globally.”

Karl Hofmann, President & CEO, Population Services International (PSI)

“Repeal of the Helms Amendment is long overdue. We support the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere act as a critical first step in a long journey to address the damage the U.S. has caused to the reproductive rights of people in other countries. The Helms Amendment has hypocritically and systematically stifled free speech in sovereign countries, impeded the provision of legal abortion allowable under their laws, and in the process contributed to avoidable maternal deaths due to unsafe abortion and a scarcity of post-abortion care. The Helms Amendment has been undermining independent partner nations since the Nixon administration. It’s well past the time to end this discriminatory and harmful statute. “

Erin Matson, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Reproaction:

“Abortion access is a human right, and the Helms Amendment has caused harm and suffering to people around the world. Reproaction strongly supports the passage of the Abortion Is Health Care Everywhere Act. The U.S.-based anti-abortion agenda is a significant driver of maternal mortality and worse outcomes for babies around the world, it’s far from ‘pro life.’. The time to end this is now.”

Jocelyn Foye, Executive 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.”

Sonja Spoo, Director of Reproductive Rights Campaigns, UltraViolet.

“Bodily autonomy and access to reproductive healthcare is the foundation of a better future for all people. The fight for reproductive freedom is a global fight that we must continue both at home and in solidarity with people around the world as they work to advance reproductive freedom. Critically, that means doing our part to ensure reproductive oppression is not a rote part of our global policy and aid. As we continue to fight back against the loss of constitutional protections for abortion in the United States, we cannot forget the broader fight for reproductive health, rights, and justice. We must continue to advocate to dismantle the policies implemented that deny the world’s most vulnerable communities the right to abortion and other critical forms of reproductive healthcare. We urge Congress to work to pass the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act as part of the overall work to expand access to abortion around the world and in the U.S.

Renee Bracey Sherman, Founder & Executive Director, We Testify

“In this moment, we need abortion access at any time, for any reason, anywhere and everywhere. The Helms Amendment is an outdated, xenophobic and racist policy that forces people of other nations to abide by horrific American anti-abortion beliefs. The Helms Amendment is unjust and colonialist at its core. What’s happening right now in the United States cannot continue to spread globally. The We Testify abortion storytellers have had abortions and we know the powerful impact safe access has had on our lives. It's time for the United States to end its imperialist reign and repeal the Helms Amendment to ensure everyone has access to abortion care, no matter where they live.”

North American Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology

“Adolescents and young adults both in the US and abroad deserve access to health systems which acknowledge their reproductive rights. For 47 years, the Helms Amendment has stood in the way of ensuring support globally for adolescents and young adults to receive confidential and comprehensive sexual and reproductive care, infringing on this human right on an international scale. Abortion care is essential health care, and the North American Society for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology applauds and endorses the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act in its aim to repeal Helms and remove this barrier to much needed health care for our patients worldwide.”

Akila Radhakrishnan, President, Global Justice Center

“With the devastating decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, the US is facing a crisis moment for abortion access domestically. Globally, the US has been exporting its ideology for nearly five decades through policies like the Helms Amendment which denies essential medical care and has been interpreted as a total ban on abortion services and information, even in countries where abortion is legal. This harmful policy puts the US in violation of its human rights obligations, denies access to hard fought rights around the world, and it is long past time for its repeal.”

Dr. Marcelle Cedars, President, American Society for Reproductive Medicine

“As we saw with the overturning of *Roe v Wade*, expanding access to reproductive care is more important now than ever, especially in developing countries where access to safe care is even more difficult to receive. Abortion access is part of reproductive health care and that is why the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act (AHCE) is so important. We applaud the introduction of this legislation and encourage Congress to do everything in its power to ensure access to comprehensive reproductive health care services is available in the US and in developing countries.”

Shannon Russell, Director of Policy, Catholics for Choice

"Catholics for Choice is proud to join with moral leaders like Sen. Cory Booker in support of the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, which would permanently end the Helms Amendment. For decades, Helms has endangered the lives of the most vulnerable people in the world — particularly Black and Brown women, trans men, and non-binary people— by denying them access to basic, life-saving reproductive healthcare. It is a grave affront to our values as faithful Catholics and American citizens, which compel us to advocate for free speech, freedom of religion, and care for the most marginalized in society. The Senate must swiftly pass the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act and end this racist, unconscionable policy once and for all."

Kathleen Mogelgaard, President and CEO, Population Institute

“For almost 50 years the United States has exported a harmful anti-abortion policy with the Helms Amendment. The Helms Amendment is a racist, colonialist policy that has put at risk the health, lives, and reproductive freedom of people across the world who have no say in U.S. policies. On the heels of the Supreme Court's decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, it is more important than ever that we fight to eliminate harmful barriers to abortion care for everyone. The Population Institute strongly supports the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, that would repeal the Helms Amendment, and we thank Senator Booker for leading this bill along with co-leads Senators Richard Blumenthal, Tammy Duckworth, Mazie Hirono, and

Tina Smith. Now is the time to end this harmful and imperialist policy, because abortion is a human right and everyone, no matter where they live, deserves access to abortion care.”

Tammy Tibbetts, Co-Founder & CEO, She’s the First

“Every girl has the right to choose her own future. Restrictions on abortion care impact girls’ health and agency at this moment, but these regulations also drastically narrow girls’ ability to choose their path as they grow into adulthood. Abortion restrictions diminish everyone’s freedom.

She’s the First supports the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act because all pregnant people should be able to access the care they need. This legislation would repeal the Helms Amendment, allowing U.S. foreign aid to fund life-saving health care. We support everyone’s right to bodily autonomy, critical healthcare, and privacy. To create a world where girls are respected, we must establish policies that protect their rights.”

Rori Kramer, Director of U.S. Advocacy, American Jewish World Service (AJWS)

“American Jewish World Service applauds the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, historic legislation which makes clear that abortion is an essential form of health care and that access to abortion is a fundamental human right. For nearly 50 years, the racist Helms Amendment has imposed arbitrary and harmful restrictions on abortion services, allowing the United States to control the bodily autonomy and dignity of vulnerable communities around the world, especially Black and brown individuals, LGBTQI+ people and sex workers.

As a faith-based organization committed to upholding the reproductive rights of all people, AJWS is grateful to the leadership of U.S. Senator Cory Booker and his colleagues — Sens. Blumenthal, Duckworth, Hirono, and Smith – for their commitment to upholding abortion as a human right for all people.”

Nancy Northup, President and CEO, Center for Reproductive Rights:

“The Helms Amendment has long contributed to the erosion of people’s bodily autonomy and fundamental human rights by stripping them of the ability to make informed decisions about their health and denying access to abortion care. It prevents U.S.-funded health care providers from offering comprehensive and essential reproductive healthcare, even when a pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, or to preserve the life or health of the pregnant person. Access to abortion is recognized as an international human right obligation and over 60 countries across all regions of the world have liberalized their abortion laws in the last 30 years. The U.S. is the only country in the world to have taken such an extreme and retrogressive step to end constitutional protections for abortion access and exports these harms via anti-abortion foreign policies. Congress must pass the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act and eliminate the Helms Amendment once and for all.”

Tara Romano, Executive Director of Pro-Choice North Carolina

"The overwhelming majority of North Carolinians believe in abortion access and that abortion is healthcare. Former U.S. Senator Jesse Helms was extremely out of touch with North Carolinians and the world, and he imposed his anti-abortion beliefs on people across the globe with the Helms Amendment, which prohibits foreign government and non-governmental organizations who receive U.S. foreign assistance from using that money to provide abortion care, even if abortion is legal in their country. These kinds of abortion bans disproportionately impact the lives and health of women of color, people of color, and Indigenous people, and run counter to the basic human right of all people to access healthcare and to access abortion. As a North Carolina organization, we call for a full and permanent repeal of the Helms Amendment!"