

The Public Affairs Pulse

Keeping You on Top of Legislative & Advocacy Issues

2013 Advocacy Round-up

January 2014 marks the beginning of a mid-term election year. As we move into yet another election cycle it is important that we look back over the previous year and take stock of where we stand.

At the federal level, there is somewhat bright news from Congress. The number of direct attacks on women's health by the first session of the 113th Congress has subsided slightly compared with the 112th Congress at the end of its first session: At the end of the first year, the 112th Congress had taken 10 floor votes deigned to restrict access to women's health care including five to defund Planned Parenthood. At the end of the first year, the 113th Congress had taken five floor votes with only two passing and no votes to defund Planned Parenthood. Seven proactive bills designed to increase access for women are also in the works.

In Michigan, the legislature began the 2013–14 session with fights over Medicaid expansion. Planned Parenthood Affiliates of Michigan (PPAM), along with progressive coalition partners, fought to ensure that Medicaid expansion would pass, increasing access to health insurance for 500,000 Michiganders. The legislature passed the expansion much later than needed and failed to pass immediate effect, resulting in a delay of implementation until April 2014.

During the summer, Right to Life (RTL) announced that it was launching a petition gathering campaign for the so-called "No Taxes for Abortion Act." While petition gathering usually results in a ballot initiative, this was not the intention. Instead RTL utilized a rarely used strategy and introduced the legislation directly to the Michigan

legislature. Despite months of organizing by PPAM and others, lawmakers passed the legislation during the last days of the session. Despite its name, the law has no bearing on tax-payers' dollars going for abortion. Rather it bans insurance companies, both in the Marketplace and in private employer plans, from covering abortion for women without the purchase of a currently non-existent rider. The law has no exceptions for rape or incest and includes a \$10,000 fine for physicians who submit an abortion coverage claim that is not covered by the law.

Research is being conducted by progressive coalitions to determine how we can move forward to defeat this law in 2014.

In addition to legislative attacks in 2013, there were legal challenges on the federal and state levels. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the cases of two private corporations in their claim to deny birth control coverage to employees. Also, Supreme Court Justices issued a decision allowing a stay on the birth control coverage provided by a limited number of religious institutions, pending reply by the federal government. At the state level, the ACLU of Michigan is suing the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) because Mercy Health in Muskegon nearly allowed a woman to die rather than provide her with accurate medical information about ending her pregnancy, based on USCCB guidelines.

Looking forward to 2014, lawmakers will start focusing on electoral activities and it is vital for us to remember that one of the most important things that we can do to promote reproductive justice is to hold them accountable at the polls.

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Source: PPAM, PPAFA

Roe v Wade Anniversary and Launch of "Planned Parenthood Generation"

January 22 marks the 41st anniversary of the landmark Roe v Wade Supreme Court decision making abortion legal for women in the United States. As we take time this month to recognize the importance of this event and reflect on the attacks that abortion rights have faced in the decades since, Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) and the Planned Parenthood Action fund (PPAF) are launching the Planned Parenthood Generation and Generation Action, programs designed to support young people in their opposition to attacks on abortion rights.

The Planned Parenthood Generation is a movement of young people across identities and issues that organizes for their generation in order to achieve reproductive freedom. Generation Action programs exist on more than 200 college campuses across the country and focus on intersectional understandings of the ways in which reproductive rights are being restricted by politicians and organizations.

Throughout Michigan, Generation Action groups on college campuses will be hosting events in honor of the anniversary of Roe v Wade to raise awareness of the importance of abortion rights and educate fellow college students on ways that they can fight for those rights.

Upcoming Opportunities

Grand Rapids: Join us on the 3rd Thursday of each month for an ACA enrollment event at Fountain Street Church. Learn about the ACA and get in-person help with enrollment. Email dani.vilella@ppmchoice.org for complete details, or to reserve a spot.