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Planned Parenthood of New York City

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Testimony on the Women's Health Protection Act
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Good afternoon. I am Julianne Verdi, Director of Government Relations at Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC). I am pleased to be here today to provide testimony in support of a resolution calling on the U.S. Congress to pass the Women's Health Protection Act. Planned Parenthood of New York City thanks our strong supporter and Chair of the New York City Council Committee on Women's Issues, the Honorable Council Member Laurie Cumbo for her leadership in convening this hearing. We'd also like to thank Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, the Committee on Women's Issues and the entire City Council for their dedication to these issues and we welcome the opportunity to discuss ways we can protect access to sexual and reproductive health care for all New Yorkers.

For almost a century, thousands of women, teens, and families have relied on Planned Parenthood of NYC (PPNYC) for professional, nonjudgmental, confidential reproductive health care. PPNYC serves more than 50,000 patients annually in our health centers currently located in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Staten Island and the Bronx. We are also proud to announce that a new health care center in Queens is under construction and is due to open in May of 2015. PPNYC provides sexual and reproductive health services including birth control; emergency contraception; gynecological care (including cervical and breast cancer screenings); colposcopy; male reproductive health exams; testing, counseling, and treatment for sexually transmitted infections; the HPV vaccine; HIV testing and counseling; pregnancy testing, options counseling (including adoption) and abortion. As such, we know firsthand that access to the full range of reproductive health care options, including abortion, is essential to women's health and central to women's social and economic equality.

Tomorrow, January 22, marks the 42nd anniversary of the United States Supreme Court decision, *Roe v. Wade*. This landmark ruling confirmed that the constitutionally protected right to privacy includes every woman's right to make her own personal medical decisions, without the interference of politicians. A majority of Americans support and respect the decision each woman must make about her own pregnancy and oppose efforts to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Despite clear legal precedent, reproductive healthcare has been under unprecedented attack in the United States for over a decade. In the first few days of 2015 alone, Congress has already introduced six anti-abortion bills. The targeted onslaught against reproductive freedom is clear. Included in the six, is a bill that would defund Planned Parenthood. This move would cripple Planned Parenthood's ability to provide essential sexual and reproductive healthcare to millions of Americans who rely on us every day. Additionally, during the last four years, we've seen an even greater onslaught of attacks on the state level. Since 2010, the states have enacted 231 restrictions on abortion. According to the Guttmacher Institute, 57% of women now live in a state that is either hostile or extremely hostile to abortion rights, meaning that the state has at least four abortion restrictions in effect.¹

Traditionally, hostile states have targeted women specifically, by focusing on regulations that seek to delay access to care or attempt to shame women for their health care decisions, such as mandatory 24-hour waiting-periods, parental involvement, and mandatory ultra-sound laws. As egregious as these restrictions are, in recent years we've seen a troubling shift of trend toward legislation targeting health

¹ <https://guttmacher.org/media/inthenews/2015/01/05/index.html>

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care providers and their ability to provide abortion care. These abortion restrictions aim to reduce the number of providers or eliminate them completely, under the guise of “protecting women’s health.” These restrictions are aggregately referred to as Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers (TRAP). TRAP laws take various forms, such as requiring providers to have admitting privileges at hospitals or dictating rigid, often unattainable clinic standards. Studies have shown that limiting the supply of abortion has a more powerful affect than traditional demand-side tactics.² TRAP laws have resulted in the closing of clinics and have increased the number of women who live more than fifty miles away from the nearest abortion-provider.³ Statistics also show that TRAP restrictions don’t actually result in a decline in abortion rates. Rather, some suggest that supply-side restrictions, delay access and cause a “sizeable number of women” not to forgo an abortion altogether, but rather to wait “later to have a more expensive surgical procedure, sometime driving twice to a facility hundreds of miles away.”⁴ For example, researchers tracking the effect of TRAP laws in Texas noted a “70% decline in medical abortion” which is “[i]n contrast to the national trend toward an increase in the proportion of abortions that are medical.” Researchers noted that this decline was “dramatic evidence of the law’s effect.”⁵

Other restrictions seeking to restrict access to abortion also include bans on types and timing of abortions like 20-week abortion bans and medically unnecessary regulations involving medication abortion. Also, troubling, one of the first bills of 2015 introduced in multiple states, a so-called sex-selective abortion ban, seizes on racial stereotypes and harmful stigmas against certain ethnic communities to deceive constituents and confuse supporters of access to quality medical care.

PPNYC understands how national and statewide attacks on reproductive healthcare impact us locally. Nearly eight percent of abortions performed in New York City are provided to women who have traveled from out of state. Restrictions enacted in other parts of the US have a direct affect on the care we are able to provide and furthers the divide along economic lines.

And yet, many of the same elected officials who introduced or supported attacks on reproductive health also campaigned on a pro-women’s health platform, because they know the majority of Americans strongly support a woman’s right to make personal decisions about when and whether to have a child. Now is the time for us to hold these politicians accountable and push for meaningful legislation that would improve the lives of women and families across the country.

The Women’s Health Protection Act would uphold and enforce the constitutionally protected right to abortion services under *Roe v. Wade*, invalidating any state or local legislation that does not adhere to federal protections. The Act would prohibit a variety of laws and regulations that single out abortion providers and abortion care for unnecessary and burdensome restrictions, restrictions which not placed on comparable medical practices. The Act would enable and ensure that qualified providers can continue to offer safe, legal, high-quality reproductive health care without political interference. This legislation is needed, because a woman’s access to the full range of sexual and reproductive healthcare should not depend on her zip code.

² http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/post/the-supply-side-economics-of-abortion/2011/10/20/gIQApcl70L_blog.html

³ http://go.nationalpartnership.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=45665&news_iv_ctrl=0&abbr=daily3

⁴ http://www.news-journal.com/opinion/forum/foster-cutting-supply-won-t-touch-abortion-demand/article_61434aec-f87a-5e65-9f56-24505bf0aa0d.html

⁵ Id.



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The Women's Health Protection Act is a vital step in protecting and strengthening our constitutional rights, but it is not the only step. We must also pass legislation so that all women, no matter their income or ability to pay, have access to affordable and comprehensive health care services, including abortion care.

New York City has long been touted as a national leader when it comes to reproductive rights. New York was one of the first states to legalize abortion in 1970 – three years before *Roe v. Wade* – and Planned Parenthood first opened here in New York City nearly 100 years ago. New Yorkers continue to overwhelmingly support access to safe and medically accurate reproductive health care. While the federal government currently restricts Medicaid coverage of abortion in nearly all cases, New York has been a leader in removing such economic barriers to health care, so that every woman can access safe, affordable abortion care when she needs it. However, we face many of the same battles that are currently playing out across the country. Just last week, the New York State Senate again failed to pass legislation codifying a person's right to an abortion and enshrine the decades-old ruling into New York's health law. These actions are very discouraging as we have always advocated that women's equality cannot be fully achieved without first ensuring women have the ability to make basic decisions when it comes to her own medical care. As attacks across the country become even more egregious, we must become even more vocal and forthright in ensuring that access to reproductive healthcare will be safeguarded in New York.

While states and local governments nationwide continue to try to roll back *Roe*, we see hope in some areas where the tide is turning. Progressive communities across the country are standing up for equal access to healthcare and looking forward not back. Council Members in Austin, Texas recently issued a letter urging passage of the Women's Health Protection Act and the San Francisco City Council passed a resolution in support of the bill.

It is time for New York City to join the progressive leaders across the country in taking a proactive lead and assert the right of all individuals to control their personal medical decisions, as well as, ensure everyone has access to a full range of reproductive health care services. Every individual must have access to safe, legal abortion services without interference from politicians. The Women's Health Protection Act would put women's health needs first and stop state restrictions that infringe upon constitutionally protected healthcare access and options. By passing a resolution in support of women's health and safety in abortion care, the New York City Council can continue to lead the nation in sexual and reproductive health equity and take a stand against the growing nationwide restrictions on abortion. PPNYC strongly urges the City Council to pass this important resolution and calls on Congress to re-introduce and pass the Women's Health Protection Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue and I would be happy to take any questions or provide additional information.

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Since 1916, Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC) has been an advocate for and provider of reproductive health services and education for New Yorkers. Through a threefold mission of clinical services, education, and advocacy, PPNYC is bringing better health and more fulfilling lives to each new generation of New Yorkers. As a voice for sexual and reproductive health equity, PPNYC supports legislation and policies to ensure that all New Yorkers—and, in fact, people around the world—will have access to the full range of reproductive health care services and information.