

October 13, 2015

Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Director Collins,

I am writing to follow up on the letter I sent you on July 29.

In that letter, I reviewed the development of the bipartisan 1993 legislation that authorized federal funding of fetal tissue transplantation research and the policies Planned Parenthood has in place to exceed the federal requirements. I also explained how that law was the result of a blue ribbon panel appointed by the Reagan Administration to consider the underlying medical and ethical issues. My letter outlined the very limited role that Planned Parenthood plays in fetal tissue research that can contribute to important medical breakthroughs. Currently, Planned Parenthood operates nearly 700 health centers that provide a wide range of vital health services to millions of women and men every year. Our role in fetal tissue research is an extremely small part of what we do. In fact, just 1% of our health centers currently facilitate tissue donation for fetal tissue research.

Over the last two months, opponents of safe and legal abortion have turned patently false claims about our role in fetal tissue donation into fodder to advance their extreme political agenda – including votes in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate that would have blocked Planned Parenthood from receiving federal reimbursements for providing cancer screenings and other preventive care. I am pleased to report that those efforts, which would have jeopardized millions of people's access to health care, have failed thus far. But this isn't just about Planned Parenthood, and it isn't over. These false claims are being used to advance politically motivated legislation in Congress and in state legislatures across the country to deny women access to basic health care and to impose medically unnecessary restrictions on safe and legal abortion. The American public overwhelmingly opposes this political agenda.

Through it all, we've heard from leading research institutions and practitioners across the country, asking Planned Parenthood not to bow to political pressure and to continue our support for patients to contribute to this important work. As the nation's leading women's health care provider, our promise to both our patients and the medical community is that we will never bow to political pressure and we will never back down from advancing women's health every way we can.

As I have stated repeatedly, the accusations leveled against Planned Parenthood are categorically false. Planned Parenthood adheres to the highest legal, medical, and ethical standards. The outrageous claims that have been made against Planned Parenthood, which have been widely discredited and debunked, are the worst kind of political interference in women's health. The real goal of these extremists has nothing to do with our fetal tissue donation compliance process but is instead to ban abortion in the U.S. and block women from getting any health care from Planned Parenthood. Today,

we're taking their smokescreen away and pushing forward with our important work on behalf of millions of women, men, and young people.

The participation by a handful of our affiliates in supporting women who choose to make fetal tissue donation has always been about nothing other than honoring the desire of those women and contributing to life-saving research and cures. In order to completely debunk the disingenuous argument that our opponents have been using – and to reveal the true political purpose of these attacks – our Federation has decided, going forward, that any Planned Parenthood health center that is involved in donating tissue after an abortion for medical research will follow the model already in place at one of our two affiliates currently facilitating donations for fetal tissue research. That affiliate accepts no reimbursement for its reasonable expenses – even though reimbursement is fully permitted under the 1993 law. Going forward, all of our health centers will follow the same policy, even if it means they will not recover reimbursements permitted by the 1993 law.

I want to be completely clear about two things: First, Planned Parenthood's policies on fetal tissue donation already exceed the legal requirements. Now we're going even further in order to take away any basis for attacking Planned Parenthood to advance an anti-abortion political agenda. And, second, our decision not to take any reimbursement for expenses should not be interpreted as a suggestion that anyone else should not take reimbursement or that the law in this area isn't strong. Our decision is first and foremost about preserving the ability of our patients to donate tissue, and to expose our opponents' false charges about this limited but important work.

Finally, in my previous letter to you, I suggested that the widespread confusion over fetal tissue research merits a review by an expert independent panel. There is now proposed federal and state legislation to ban fetal tissue donation for research. I believe these public policy proposals would benefit from the expertise from NIH and medical and ethical leaders, and I again encourage you to develop a deliberative process to ensure that Congress and state legislatures have the benefit of such guidance and recommendations.

Thank you for your interest in this issue.

Sincerely,

Cecile Richards
President
Planned Parenthood Federation of America

cc: Secretary Sylvia Matthews Burwell