

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
1233 Longworth House Building Office
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Minority Leader
233 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 8, 2017

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, House Speaker Ryan, and House Minority Leader Pelosi,

We, the undersigned organizations committed to the health and rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people, urge Congress not to block patients from accessing critical, federally supported sexual and reproductive health care and information from Planned Parenthood.

For 100 years, Planned Parenthood has been an essential source of compassionate health care in the United States. Planned Parenthood health centers across the country provide lifesaving primary and preventive care, including cancer screenings, birth control, and sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV services to 2.5 million people every year – nearly half of whom are people of color, and many people who live in rural areas.

LGBTQ people have unique health care needs and often experience significant challenges in getting the sexual and reproductive health care they seek. For instance, LGBTQ individuals are less likely to be insured¹ and are at higher risk for HIV² and certain cancers.³ Moreover, the discrimination and harassment that LGBTQ people too often endure within and outside of the medical system also has negative effects on mental and physical health.⁴ Unfortunately, the disparities are even more pronounced among LGBTQ people of color.⁵

¹ Gary J. Gates, "In U.S., LGBT More Likely Than Non-LGBT to Be Uninsured," Gallup (Aug. 2014), available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/175445/lgbt-likely-non-lgbt-uninsured.aspx>.

² Human Rights Campaign, "How HIV Impacts LGBTQ People" (Feb. 2017), available at <http://www.hrc.org/resources/hrc-issue-brief-hiv-aids-and-the-lgbt-community>.

³ Kaiser Family Foundation, *Health and Access to Care and Coverage for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Individuals in the U.S.* (Nov. 2016), available at <http://kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/health-and-access-to-care-and-coverage-for-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-individuals-in-the-u-s/>.

⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, *Healthy People 2020: LGBT Health Topic Area* (2015), available at <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-health>.

⁵ Center for American Progress, "Health Disparities in LGBT Communities of Color: By the Numbers" (2010), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2010/01/15/7132/health-disparities-in-lgbt-communities-of-color>.

Planned Parenthood takes pride in providing high-quality health care for LGBTQ people. Its doors are open to everyone — regardless of their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. And Planned Parenthood is committed to providing care that is tailored to the needs and concerns of LGBTQ patients. Planned Parenthood and other reproductive health clinics have been at the forefront of providing safe, welcoming spaces for LGBT people to receive critical health care services, when others in the health care system have been less welcoming. Planned Parenthood has in fact become one of the largest providers of health care to transgender people in the U.S. As the nation’s largest provider of sex education, Planned Parenthood provides accurate information, education, and resources on the full range of topics relating to sexuality and sexual health, including sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity to youth and adults of all ages every day.

Because of the importance of Planned Parenthood to LGBTQ health, we strongly oppose the intent of Congressional leadership to bar Medicaid patients across the country from using their coverage to access care from Planned Parenthood health centers - through budget reconciliation or by any other means. If these actions were to succeed, it would be a public health disaster. Experts agree that other safety net health care providers – many of whom already face significant challenges meeting existing demand – could not successfully absorb the flood of patients defunding Planned Parenthood would cause.⁶ Many patients would have nowhere else to turn for care.

The general public joins the LGBTQ health and rights community in its support for Planned Parenthood, and strongly opposes “defunding” care at Planned Parenthood health centers. In fact, 19 separate nationwide polls show the public’s strong support for Planned Parenthood and strong opposition to defunding efforts.⁷

Thus, we urge the 115th Congress to support the millions of patients who depend on vital care from Planned Parenthood health centers. Given the health challenges facing LGBTQ populations today, our country must expand – not limit – timely access to trusted providers of sexual and reproductive health care.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Julie Gonen, Policy Director at the National Center for Lesbian Rights, at jgonen@nclrights.org.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth
American Civil Liberties Union

⁶ Sara Rosenbaum, “Planned Parenthood, Community Health Centers, And Women’s Health: Getting The Facts Right,” *Health Affairs* (Sept. 2015) available at <http://healthaffairs.org/blog/2015/09/02/planned-parenthood-community-health-centers-and-womens-health-getting-the-facts-right/>.

⁷ Planned Parenthood Action Fund, *Public Overwhelmingly Supports Planned Parenthood* (Jan. 2017), available at https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/uploads/filer_public/f2/81/f281aa0f-9f38-4da2-b2b9-1f37ae490d2d/20170105_fs-ppsupport_r4.pdf (citing the results of 19 national polls).

American Psychological Association
Basic Rights Oregon
Equality California
Equality Federation
Family Equality Council
FORGE, Inc.
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality
GLSEN
HIV Medicine Association
Human Rights Campaign
Lambda Legal
Los Angeles LGBT Center
Movement Advancement Project
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs
National Council of Jewish Women
People For the American Way
PFLAG National
Pride at Work
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)
The National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
The Trevor Project
Transcend Legal
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
Whitman-Walker Health
Witness to Mass Incarceration