Senator Osten, Representative Walker, thank you for this opportunity to testify on the Governor’s budget, as you deliberate on your own budget. I am Susan Yolen, Vice President for Policy and Advocacy at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE). PPSNE is the largest provider of family planning and reproductive health care in Connecticut, serving about 65,000 patients annually at 16 health centers across the state.

I will be brief. Last week, Planned Parenthood and all providers of family planning were attacked by the US Department of Health and Human Services when it posted the final version of the Title X “gag rule.” The gag rule is an ideologically based policy that will make it virtually impossible for Planned Parenthood to continue to receive the federal Title X grant.

- At risk is our Title X grant, a total of about $2.4 million each year, has, for decades, allowed Planned Parenthood to offer family planning services and contraceptives to uninsured patients on a sliding fee scale at our 16 health centers statewide, and funding care for about 38,000 of our patients who are uninsured.
- The gag rule will intentionally limit options counseling and referral if a patient is seeking to terminate a pregnancy. As a result, Planned Parenthood will no longer accept these funds, which interfere with the relationship between patient and provider.
- Governor Lamont and Attorney General Tong have been proactive on this front and Connecticut will be joining a federal lawsuit to prevent the implementation of the gag rule. Pending the outcome of the litigation, an effective date for the rule to be imposed remains uncertain.
- In the event that the litigation is not successful, Planned Parenthood may not be able to serve our patients statewide, and we hope that this committee would consider providing contingency funding to supplant the lost Title X funds.

In the face of this threat, I call your attention to a cut proposed in the Governor’s budget of about $380,000, in the Community Health Services line of the DPH budget. This budget line has included somewhat more than $1 million to PPSNE in state family planning funding that has supplemented our Title X program. This cut would seriously compound the loss I have just described.

At a time of severe budgetary constraints, we appreciate the fact that so many programs, services, and vital nonprofit agencies are deeply concerned about keeping their doors open. Under a different President, without an ideologically-motivated threat against our organization, Planned Parenthood would not make this request. However, it is also important to note that impact of an investment in family planning is significant: the savings from every public dollar invested in family planning is about $7 within a year, from unintended pregnancies averted. This would not be the time, and in the context of the Title X gag rule, to retreat from or weaken Connecticut’s longstanding investment in family planning.

Thank you for this opportunity to address these important budgetary considerations.