

**Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW
Director, Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc.**

**In support of raised House Bill 7359 *An Act Concerning a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
Transgender and Queer Health and Human Services Network.*
March 21, 2019**

Good afternoon Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and honorable members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Gretchen Raffa, Director of Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support of raised *House Bill 7359 An Act Concerning a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Health and Human Services Network*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 60,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services in 16 health centers across the state. As a health care provider and advocate, Planned Parenthood's top priority is ensuring that all individuals have access to the health care and information they need, including the full range of reproductive health services and education, to make positive sexual and reproductive health decisions. We understand how important it is for all people to have access to high-quality, nonjudgmental health care that affirms their identity, their family, and their sexuality — as well as the ability and resources to make their own health care decisions with dignity.

Planned Parenthood believes that reproductive rights are deeply connected to LGBTQ rights and we are proud to be a provider for so many in the LGBTQ+ communities and continue to expand our services to meet the needs of the LGBTQ+ community like providing hormone therapy to transgender patients and offering PrEP to prevent HIV transmission. People achieve reproductive freedom when they have full autonomy over their bodies and lives – this not only includes access to health care, but it is the ability to live without fear of harm from discriminatory policies. We believe that the ability to access health care are basic human rights and we must work to eliminate unnecessary hurdles or barriers for people to access that care and are committed to making our world a place where no one experiences discrimination or violence because of their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

Despite the progress made in LGBTQ rights, archaic legislation at all levels of government continues to threaten LGBTQ people's ability to access health care, raise their families, and live their most authentic lives. We are seeing truly appalling bills across the country and administrative rules and rhetoric from the Federal government targeting the LGBTQ communities, especially transgender and gender nonconforming people, and repeated attempts to undo the nearly half-century of progress by LGBTQ activists in the fight for civil rights, justice, and equality.

In the first year of the Trump-Pence administration they issued a far-reaching Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) rule that would allow health care workers to deny patients' access to care and information for women and LGBTQ people based on their personal beliefs. It has also created an HHS office designed to ensure that individuals can be denied access to basic health care and information based on their providers' personal beliefs — a significant step toward blocking access to care for women, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized people. It has also rolled back Title IX guidance that prohibits schools from discriminating against transgender students. In 2018 the Trump-Pence Administration continued to advance discriminatory policies that undermine the ability of LGBTQ people to access health care and other services. It also restricted the right of transgender people to serve in the military, and the right of people living with HIV to serve in the Peace Corps. They have also promoted religion-based discrimination against LGBT people, eliminated critical nondiscrimination protections, and appointed federal judges who oppose LGBT equality.

LGBTQ people in the U.S. — especially those who are transgender, people of color, or both — are often less able to access quality health care due to the intersections of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and other systemic barriers and have faced a particularly long history of stigma and discrimination based on their sexual and gender identity. As such, they are more likely to rely on federally funded programs because of lack of insurance coverage. The attempts made by extreme politicians to repeal the Affordable Care Act, gut the Medicaid program, prohibit patients with Medicaid insurance coverage from coming to Planned Parenthood would compound the obstacles that can stand in the way of access to essential and lifesaving health care. Most recently the Trump-Pence administration has issued the Title X gag rule dismantling the program founded nearly 50 years ago to provide affordable reproductive health care to millions of Americans. This gag rule threatens to worsen inequities for LGBTQ people with limited resources who turn to the program for basic preventive care.

Title X is critical to meeting the unique sexual and reproductive health needs of LGBTQ populations.

- *Cancer screenings.* Access to Pap tests is particularly important for lesbian/bisexual women, who are much less likely than their heterosexual counterparts to get routine Pap tests for cervical cancer.ⁱ Similarly, lesbian women have high rates of some risk factors for breast cancer.ⁱⁱ
- *Contraception.* Lesbian/bisexual women experience unintended pregnancy at high ratesⁱⁱⁱ -- a concerning inequity that could be made worse by reducing access to Title X-funded contraceptive counseling and care. In 2016, 2.8 million female Title X patients adopted or continued use of a contraceptive method at their last visit.
- *STI services.* LGBTQ people, especially men who have sex with men (MSM), face a disproportionate STI burden, making access to STI prevention counseling, testing, and treatment vital.^{iv} In 2016, Title X centers tested 2.1 million patients for chlamydia, 2.3 million patients for gonorrhea, and 635,000 patients for syphilis.
- *HIV/AIDS services.* MSM, including gay/bisexual men, account for the vast majority of people living with HIV and new HIV diagnoses in the United States. Transgender women also bear a disproportionate HIV burden.^v Title X centers provide HIV counseling, testing, diagnosis, and linkage to care. In 2016, Title X centers provided 1.2 million HIV tests.
- *LGBTQ-friendly care.* LGBTQ people frequently report lacking access to culturally appropriate care.^{vi}

LGBTQ people are more likely to be economically disadvantaged, making safety-net programs like Title X a critical source of affordable care.

- When compared to heterosexual people, gay/bisexual men and lesbian/bisexual women experience higher rates of poverty.^{vii}
- Transgender people are more likely to live in poverty and less likely to have health coverage when compared to the overall population. In one study, nearly half reported delaying or forgoing health care because they could not afford it.^{viii}
- LGBTQ youth are more likely to be homeless than their non-LGBTQ peers, which is likely to affect their access to financial resources and limit access to health care.^{ix}
- A number of barriers, including persistent discrimination in the workplace and in housing, may contribute to the economic disparities that affect LGBTQ people.^x

Planned Parenthood believes that every individual has the right to determine their own reproductive destiny and understands that right is directly linked to the conditions in their communities. That includes the right to plan their families, live in safe and healthy environments and to control their bodies, their gender and their sexuality.

Connecticut lawmakers have secured legal rights and protections for LGBTQ people in our state over the last several decades which we are grateful for and yet there are so many pressing issues still facing the LGBTQ+ community in our state that need to be addressed by our policy makers. Connecticut has an opportunity to be a national leader by passing H.B. 7359 which will dedicate necessary resources to conduct a needs assessment and then address the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in Connecticut by supporting the organizations that are serving this population who are often underfunded and under resourced. By creating an LGBTQ health and human services network the legislature will help build a safer and healthier environment for LGBTQ+ people and their families in Connecticut by establishing a system to make recommendations to the state officials concerning the delivery of health and human services to the LGBTQ+ community. Planned Parenthood strongly supports this bill and will continue to fight for policies that protect the rights of all people to ensure our patients and our communities have what they need to live healthy, safer and self-determined lives. We urge the committee to vote favorably for HB 7359. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

ⁱ Fenway Institute https://fenwayhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/COM1050_MUP_HPSA-Brief_WebReady.pdf

ⁱⁱ <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/healthcare/302978-breast-cancer-risks-higher-for-lesbians-and-bisexual-women>

ⁱⁱⁱ Lesbian and bisexual women's likelihood of becoming pregnant: a systematic review and meta-analysis <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5299536/>

^{iv} Health and Access to Care and Coverage for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Individuals in the U.S., Kaiser Family Foundation

<https://www.kff.org/report-section/health-and-access-to-care-and-coverage-lgbt-individuals-in-the-us-health-challenges/>

^v Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/index.html>

^{vi} Fenway Institute https://fenwayhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/COM1050_MUP_HPSA-Brief_WebReady.pdf

^{vii} Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons & Socioeconomic Status, American Psychological Association

<https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/lgbt>

^{viii} Health and Access to Care and Coverage for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Individuals in the U.S., Kaiser Family Foundation

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^{ix} Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons & Socioeconomic Status, American Psychological Association

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