

Testimony of Susan L Yolen, Vice President, Policy & Advocacy,
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England on
S.B. No. 394 (COMM) AN ACT ESTABLISHING A COUNCIL ON PROTECTING WOMEN'S HEALTH
Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
March 4, 2019

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg and member of the Public Health Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to comment on SB 394, An Act Establishing a Council on Protecting Women's Health. I am Susan Yolen, Vice President for Policy and Advocacy at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, the state's largest provider of family planning and reproductive health care. We provide services to over 65,000 women and men annually at our 16 health centers across Connecticut.

Senate Bill 934 is a welcome signal, in a country where only last week, the US Department of Health and Human Services posted its final draft of a gag order to be levied on the Title X national family planning program. This is a rule that will almost certainly deprive Planned Parenthood of more than \$2 million in family planning grant funding that we have overseen in Connecticut since the 1970s, supporting important basic health care: annual visits, cancer screenings, pregnancy testing, counseling and referral, and coverage of effective reliable contraceptives to those who lack other access to care or coverage. The gag rule will make it impossible for any abortion provider to comply with the constraints necessary to continue to receive Title X. The gag rule will also make it devilishly hard for any other provider who receives those funds, to provide unbiased options counseling to pregnant people, and will make referral for abortion, if that is a person's preference, into a virtual scavenger hunt for a provider.

I mention this rule because, like the "global gag rule" that constrains US AID health care dollars abroad it is ideologically motivated, immoral, and medically unsound. It will deprive those women most in need of health care and a trusted provider and will most heavily impact low income women and women of color. The gag rule is completely out of line with the way Connecticut approaches the issue of reproductive health and rights. And yet, like the Hyde Amendment and other bad policy, it is being imposed by Washington DC on Connecticut, and will very likely impact about 38,000 individuals who get care that Title X has helped subsidized.

SB 394 was written, I believe, to address just such a situation, and to marshal the resources, and to reaffirm the will of our state, to address, reject and/or protect those in Connecticut, who might be impacted by dangerous federal policy. So, Planned Parenthood is grateful that this bill recognizes need for an active response to such situation, borne out by our own experience with the vagaries or intentionally damaging intent of federal action.

It is worth noting that our state has established a pretty good record of swift official response to the erosion of our rights. The gag rule example is one of them: our delegation to Congress is unified in deploring such policy. The Lamont Administration, similarly, is front and center around this issue: Governor Lamont was one of ten newly elected governors to sign a letter deploring the gag rule. And Attorney General Tong, like his proactive predecessors in that office, is joining other state attorneys general in a federal lawsuit to enjoin the rule.

It is likewise very important that the General Assembly be apprised of legislation, rules, regulations, and executive orders at the federal level and any litigation relating to women's health and wellness that has the potential to negatively impact women's health in the state, and to take whatever steps in their power to mitigate the effects. Things can move very quickly on the federal level. Rules and Regulations are often promulgated with limited time for official comment.

Thus, Planned Parenthood would suggest rather than a new Council, to ensure attention to these matters on all levels of government and adequate staffing for this critical work, that the General Statutes be amended to require the existing Connecticut Commission on Women, Children and Seniors in consultation with the newly created Governor's Council on Women and Girls, to monitor federal

actions, report to the committees of cognizance and suggest both legislative strategies and possible litigation to ensure that the actions of the federal government do not impede the provision of health care to women and others who may be impacted, in our state.

The Governor's Council is already composed of the Commissioners who are mentioned in this bill, which includes the Constitutional officers, and representatives of the four caucuses of the legislature. Chaired by the Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of Policy and Management, the Governor's Council has already been charged with reviewing government policies and practices supporting the needs of women and girls, including health.

We trust these suggestions will be taken as friendly amendments to this bill, particularly in a period when state funds to support the work of additional or potentially duplicative entities, are sorely limited. We appreciate your support of women's health care and your understanding of the need to defend our state against dangerous and unwelcome federal policy. We welcome further thoughts and look forward to working with this committee to address any and all erosions of the health and rights that we so deeply value in Connecticut.