



**Testimony for Public Hearing
Committee on Human Services
March 5, 2020**

IN SUPPORT OF S.B. 274 *An Act Concerning Increased Funding to Planned Parenthood and Other Family Planning Clinics*

Dear Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee:

We respectfully submit the following testimony in support of S.B. 274, *An Act Concerning Increased Funding to Planned Parenthood and Other Family Planning Clinics*. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) is a membership organization dedicated to the advancement of women's health care through education, practice, research and advocacy. The Connecticut Section represents well over 900 obstetrician-gynecologists and partners in women's health here in our state.

As obstetricians and gynecologists, we take care of women and girls – as well as their partners – throughout the sexual and reproductive life course. This bill will provide critical funding to ensure that *all* Connecticut *people* – regardless of where they live, how much money they make, their background, or whether they have health insurance — have access to basic, preventive reproductive health care.

As you know, Title X is the only federal grant program that supports the provision of family planning and essential preventive care services to low-income people. Until July 2019, when Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE) was forced out of the Title X program after having served as the Connecticut grantee since the program's inception in 1971, Title X funds were distributed to a range of municipal health departments, community health centers and school-based health clinics here in our state. Without this program, more than 41,000 people in Connecticut – more than half of whom identify as people of color – would have lost access to birth control, STD/HIV services, and lifesaving cancer screenings. Even despite nationwide funding cuts of \$31 million since 2010, Connecticut urban and rural counties saw a *73 percent reduction in the teen pregnancy rate* from the peak year to 2013 – a drop second only to those in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.¹ Public health victories like that were due

¹ <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/national-state-data/connecticut>
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db264.pdf>

Testimony in Support of S.B. 274

3/5/2020

in large part to the good work of qualified providers – many of whom are CT ACOG members – who provided high-quality, affordable patient care through Connecticut’s Title X program.

As Connecticut’s obstetricians and gynecologists, we are proud of our role in creating positive public health outcomes for patients across the state. However, the Trump-Pence Administration’s recent changes to Title X, known as the domestic gag rule, now threaten the progress we have made over the past few decades.

When patients walk through our office, hospital or clinic doors, they put their trust in us to provide to them all of the accurate information necessary to make decisions that are best for their health and wellbeing. Providing patients with comprehensive, timely and evidenced-based information and options counseling is *the* standard of care in our profession. Yet, under the Trump-Pence Administration’s domestic gag rule, doctors, nurses, hospitals, and community health centers that receive Title X funds are now prohibited from referring their patients for safe, legal abortion. (Ironically, the rule would permit Title X providers to *exclude* certain forms of FDA-approved contraceptive methods and offer contraceptive methods that are *not* medically approved.) By excluding some qualified providers like PPSNE (and all other Planned Parenthood affiliates in the U.S.) from the Title X program altogether, the rule has jeopardized access to birth control and preventive health care for millions of women across the country, especially low-income women of color. Undermining a program that disproportionately serves women of color at a time when those communities already suffer demonstrably poorer health outcomes than their white counterparts is simply indefensible.

Our state has a long history of supporting access to essential health benefits for our poorest and most marginalized patients, and the recent changes to Title X have forced a misguided and ill-advised departure from this admirable record. Notably, the Connecticut State Legislature has made it clear that this is not the right direction for our state. In 2018, the General Assembly passed – and Governor Malloy signed into law – H.B. 5210, an act that mandates insurance coverage of essential health benefits and the expansion of benefits to women, children and adolescents. As the then-Governor pointed out in a letter to the General Assembly², mandating such benefits through legislative action is meaningless if our citizens cannot afford or access such benefits in the first place. This is the role Title X fills and is exactly why the domestic gag rule is so damaging.

Finally, the domestic gag rule’s requirements run counter to the informed-consent principles set forth by ACOG, which hold that complete and accurate information are vital to a patient’s health-care decision-making. This is a fundamental principle that guides health care providers every day: patients’ needs are paramount, and providers have an *ethical obligation* to put the needs of patients first. The prohibition on abortion referrals contravenes medical ethics and has left providers with an unconscionable and unacceptable Hobson’s choice between not providing the best level of medical care or no longer participating in the Title X program, thereby potentially leaving our patients without access to *any* care at all. This is unconscionable. Furthermore, precluding Planned Parenthood—*which served 88% of Connecticut’s Title X patients in 2018*—from participating in the Title X program, threatens to irreversibly undermine Connecticut’s family planning program should the lost Title X funds not be replaced by a meaningful and sustainable appropriation in the state budget.

² <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/2A771F471B984F3BB3D39CD1A065340B.pdf>

Testimony in Support of S.B. 274

3/5/2020

Connecticut ACOG strongly supports S.B. 274 and urges the Committee to vote favorably for this important bill, which supports funding for family planning providers, including Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, and protects access to sexual and reproductive health care for those most in need in our state. We remain grateful to Governor Lamont and elected leaders for supporting family planning funding in the budget and continuing our state's strong commitment to protecting and ensuring that our patients continue to have access to safe, effective and timely care.

Respectfully submitted,

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