

April 26, 2016

Dear Representative:

As organizations concerned about women's health, we urge you to support an amendment by Representatives Speier and Veasey to the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act that would ensure that service women and military dependents have access to abortion, regardless of where they are stationed.

All women deserve access to safe abortions in their communities, including members of our military and their families. Unfortunately, since 1996, federal lawⁱ has prohibited the Department of Defense from providing abortions at military treatment facilities (MTFs) except in cases of rape or incest and where the woman's life is endangered. This restriction, known as the facilities ban, increases the hardship that service women and dependents face in accessing abortion services within the United States and overseas.

Because federal law also separately restricts TRICARE from comprehensively covering the full range of pregnancy-related care, including abortion, our service women and families must overcome significant hurdles just to access abortion. Until the coverage restriction is eliminated, Congress should—at the very least—lift the facilities ban and allow service women and military family members to access and pay for abortions on MTFs. That is exactly what the Speier Veasey amendment would do.

Service women and military dependents must be able to depend on their MTFs for medical care, including when stationed overseas or living in areas where local access is inadequate. Within the United States, service women must confront the unprecedented number of laws that restrict women's ability to access safe and legal abortion throughout the country. These laws are shutting down abortion clinics and imposing additional burdens (such as requiring multiple provider visits and mandating medically unnecessary procedures) that both delay and prolong the time a woman must take to receive care.ⁱⁱ These laws harm all women but service women are uniquely impacted because of travel restrictions that might be imposed on their units and rules requiring them to obtain permission to leave the base. If she is denied permission to travel for the abortion or the multiple state-mandated visits, she could be left without access to constitutionally-protected care that she needs.

Additionally, many countries where the United States has significant military operations allow abortion only in very limited or no circumstances.ⁱⁱⁱ Deployed service women may therefore have to travel long distances to and from the U.S. or a more hospitable country to access abortion, which could delay the care and increase health and safety risks.^{iv} Even when abortion is available in the country in which she is deployed, she may have to resort to local facilities that are substandard, unsafe, or have language barriers. The ban could also force a woman to resort to other methods that are dangerous, ineffective, or life threatening.

We strongly believe that the women who serve our country, and their family members,

should not be denied access to a constitutionally protected health care service at MTFs. Medical decisions must be left to families and their trusted health care providers. The facilities ban interferes with the provider-patient relationship by needlessly limiting the care our military health care professionals can provide to their patients at the MTF and threatens the health of military women and dependents.

Please continue to support our military women by supporting the Speier Veasey amendment to eliminate the ban on abortion on military treatment facilities.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Civil Liberties Union
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Medical Student Association
Black Women for Wellness
Black Women's Health Imperative
Catholics for Choice
Center for Reproductive Rights
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
Ibis Reproductive Health
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Institute for Science and Human Values
Jewish Woman International
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Abortion Federation
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Network of Abortion Funds
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women's Health Network
National Women's Law Center
National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of American
Population Institute
Reproductive Health Technologies Project
Service Women's Action Network
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)

SisterLove, Inc.
SisterReach
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity

ⁱ 10 U.S.C. § 1093(b) (2016).

ⁱⁱ For example, targeted regulations of abortion providers, or TRAP laws, have closed more than half the clinics in Texas in the last two years, threaten to close the last clinic in Mississippi, and make it so that several other states have just one or two providers. 2013 Tex. Gen. Laws 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The World's Abortion Laws 2015*, Center for Reproductive Rights, <http://worldabortionlaws.com/> (last visited Apr. 13, 2016). *E.g.*, Korea.

^{iv} David F. Burelli, Abortion Services and Military Medical Facilities (Cong. Research Serv., Jan. 9, 2013) available at <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/95-387.pdf>.