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Religious Institute Releases Statement from People of Faith in Support of Planned Parenthood

Statement urges Congress to abandon attempts to deny funds for Planned Parenthood, calls for access to health care, lifts up values of love of neighbor and care for the vulnerable.

March 1, 2017— Today, people of faith are sending a strong message to Congress that stripping access to health care from millions of people is both immoral and hypocritical. Last week, a copy of the Republican plan to replace the Affordable Care Act was leaked. It included a provision that would strip all federal funding from Planned Parenthood. Lawmakers won't lose their health care under this replacement plan, but millions of Americans will.

As patients and providers gather at the U.S. Capitol to respond to lawmakers' threats to jeopardize the health care millions receive from Planned Parenthood, the Religious Institute released a statement urging Congress "to abandon all attempts to deny federal funds for Planned Parenthood and to make a public commitment to comprehensive, affordable, and accessible reproductive health care." The statement is available for people of faith and religious leaders to add their names.

The statement highlights the values undergirding faith communities' support for the patients and health care providers of Planned Parenthood. It reads, in part, "Rooted in our commitment to love our neighbor, work for justice, and care for those in need, we will not allow the misuse of religion or the politics of division to deny health care and promote injustice in our communities."

The statement also acknowledges the ways religion has been used to justify attacks on reproductive health care and denounces the use of religion to "harm others, burden them with shame, deny them control of their bodies, and undermine their consciences." Instead, in the statement, people of faith pledge to "take up the sacred task of resistance and proclaim that using one's religious beliefs to deny health care to millions of people is unjust and immoral." It continues, "We believe that justice, radical inclusion, moral autonomy, and care for the vulnerable must have the final say. This is what it means to love our neighbors. Our neighbors look to Planned Parenthood health centers for care."

Speaking about the most recent attempt to defund Planned Parenthood health centers, Religious Institute President and CEO Rev. Marie Alford-Harkey said, "My faith teaches me that loving our neighbor as ourselves and caring for those in need are non-negotiable responsibilities. It is not loving our neighbor as ourselves to deny health care to people who already face barriers to obtaining it. It is not caring for those in need to strip funding from the only facilities available for reproductive health care, family planning, sexuality education, testing and treatment for STIs, and other necessary care. As a person of faith, I call on lawmakers to stop playing politics with people's lives."

Stripping funding from Planned Parenthood would have drastic effects on the health of Americans across the country. Approximately 1 in 5 women rely on Planned Parenthood for health care. People of color,

who make up nearly half of Planned Parenthood's patients, and people who live in rural areas will be particularly affected. People of faith and religious leaders are among the millions of people who rely on the compassionate health care Planned Parenthood provides.

Presbyterian minister Rev. Emma Horn says, "I stand with Planned Parenthood because as a grown adult with insurance and a well-paying job, I recently had to use them for the first time. All of the OB-GYNs in my area had a six-month waiting period for a well-woman exam. I was able to get a next day appointment with Planned Parenthood, renew my prescription, and talk to kind doctors and nurses, and it was covered by my insurance. Planned Parenthood does not just serve those in financial crisis but, fills needs when other doctors are too busy or booked up."

Metropolitan Community Church pastor Rev. Lisa Heilig shared her experience saying, "Planned Parenthood provided me affordable and sensitive gynecological care as well as education and birth control to empower my choices in expressing my sexuality. The level of professionalism, compassion, and commitment shown by Planned Parenthood has remained with me for all these 30 years and I am forever grateful that they continue to be able to provide services to empower reproductive choices."