December 17, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Re: Call for Executive Action to Support Helms Amendment Repeal

Dear President Biden,

We, the undersigned organizations, call on you to protect reproductive freedom and bodily autonomy for people across the globe by demonstrating your support for the repeal of the Helms Amendment. Failure to do so is in direct conflict with the priorities stated by this administration to “promote access to sexual and reproductive health and rights both at home and abroad.” We urge you to proactively protect essential human rights, including abortion, for people in other countries as well as our own. We appreciate the actions you have taken in support of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including repealing the Global Gag Rule and calling for increased UNFPA funding. However, simply reversing harm inflicted by the previous administration is not enough to make meaningful progress on health and human rights.

We write to you on this day specifically because it is the 48th anniversary of the passage of the Helms Amendment, which prohibits U.S. foreign aid from being used for “the performance of abortion as a method of family planning.” This provision is over-implemented as a total ban on abortion under any circumstance, denying millions of mostly Black and brown people in low-to-middle income countries the health care they want and need. Authored by the late Sen. Jesse Helms, this policy has roots in racism and neocolonialism, allowing the U.S. to police other countries through the power of foreign assistance and control their policies even in instances where countries have expanded abortion access. The result is drastic global health inequities, stifled bodily autonomy, and preventable death.

Last year, many of us called on your administration to support the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act, which repeals the Helms Amendment. The Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act now has over 170 cosponsors and is endorsed by a diverse coalition of over 175 organizations. The Helms Amendment was also successfully removed from the House-passed Fiscal Year 2022 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill. Despite growing momentum for repeal of the Helms Amendment, it remained in the FY22 President’s Budget and was not addressed in the recently released National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, both missed opportunities to ensure bodily autonomy for people globally, no matter who they are or where they live.

Today, one year later, our asks of your administration are more urgent than ever. Increases in state legislation restricting reproductive freedom, coupled with the current Supreme Court case, Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, which threatens Roe v. Wade and abortion access domestically, as well as a growing global anti-rights movement, make the need to protect sexual and reproductive rights critical. And while your administration works to protect the constitutional right to abortion domestically, it must also rigorously defend and uphold the right to abortion care for people outside the U.S. Therefore we urge you to signal your support for proactive repeal of the Helms Amendment from the Foreign
Assistance Act by supporting the Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act and striking the Helms Amendment from the upcoming FY23 President’s Budget.

While ending abortion restrictions in U.S. foreign assistance is one of the many steps necessary to protect the right to health care, including meaningful access to sexual and reproductive health care globally, it is critical to end the damage of racist and neocolonialist policies like the Helms amendment that have plagued communities for decades. U.S. politicians have controlled the lives and bodies of people living thousands of miles away for 48 years too long.

Abortion Access Front
Abortion Liberation Fund of PA
Advocates for Youth
Advocating Opportunity
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Humanist Association
American Jewish World Service
American Medical Student Association
Amnesty International USA
Beyond the Bans Colorado
Black Women’s Health Imperative
California Latinas for Reproductive Justice
Catholics for Choice
Center for American Progress
Center for Biological Diversity

Human Rights Campaign
Human Rights Watch
Ibis Reproductive Health
IKAR
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law (IANGEL)
International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD)
International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
International Women's Convocation
Ipas
Jacobs Institute of Women's Health
John Snow, Inc. (JSI)
Keshet
Last Mile4D
Legal Voice

Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Population Connection Action Fund
Population Council
Population Institute
Population Services International (PSI)
Positive Women's Network-USA
Provide
Reconstructing Judaism
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Reproaction
Reproductive Health Access Project
Reproductive Health Network Kenya
SHIP
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<td>Center for Reproductive Rights</td>
<td>Lift Louisiana</td>
<td>SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change</td>
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<td>Clearinghouse on Women's Issues</td>
<td>MADRE</td>
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<td>Coalition of Labor Union Women</td>
<td>Management Sciences for Health</td>
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<td>SisterSong: National Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective</td>
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<td>MenEngage Alliance</td>
<td>SlutwalkNOLA.org</td>
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<td>Society for Humanistic Judaism</td>
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<td>Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine</td>
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<td>NARAL Pro-Choice America</td>
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<td>National Abortion Federation</td>
<td>The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries</td>
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<td>End Rape On Campus</td>
<td>National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)</td>
<td>The Global Justice Institute</td>
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<td>National Association of Social Workers</td>
<td>The Womxn Project (TWP)</td>
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<td>Every Mother Counts</td>
<td>National Birth Equity Collaborative</td>
<td>Together for Girls</td>
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<td>Feminist Majority Foundation</td>
<td>National Center for Lesbian Rights</td>
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<td>National Center for Transgender Equality</td>
<td>UltraViolet</td>
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<td>Freedom Network USA</td>
<td>National Council of Jewish Women</td>
<td>Union for Reform Judaism</td>
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<td>Friends of the Earth</td>
<td>National Health Law Program</td>
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<td>Funders Concerned About AIDS</td>
<td>National Institute for Reproductive Health</td>
<td>URGE: Unite for Reproductive &amp; Gender Equity</td>
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<td>Global Justice Center</td>
<td>National Network of Abortion Funds</td>
<td>We Testify</td>
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<td>Global Justice Institute, Metropolitan Community Churches</td>
<td>National Organization for Women</td>
<td>White Ribbon Alliance</td>
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<td>Global Network of Black People working in HIV</td>
<td>North American Society of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology</td>
<td>Women Enabled International</td>
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Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation
Nurses for Sexual & Reproductive Health (NSRH)
Women Have Options/ Ohio

Guttmacher Institute
OutRight Action International
Women of Reform Judaism

Health GAP
PAI
Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

Heartland Alliance International
Pathfinder International
Women's Refugee Commission

Hispanic Federation

CC:
Kamala D. Harris, Vice President
Anthony J. Blinken, Secretary of State
Samantha Power, Administrator, US Agency for International Development
Jennifer Klein, Co-Chair and Executive Director of the Gender Policy Council
Shilpa Phadke, Deputy Director of the Gender Policy Council
Rachel Vogelstein, Senior Advisor, Gender Policy Council
Kalisha Figures, Special Assistant to the President for Gender Policy