

**Alaska Wilderness League * Sierra Club * League of Conservation Voters
Natural Resources Defense Council * Green Latinos * Green For All * Safe Climate Campaign *
Environmental Working Group * Endangered Species Coalition * Earthworks *
Center for Biological Diversity * Defenders of Wildlife * Oil Change International
The Climate Reality Project* Climate Vote Hawks * Clean Water Action * 350.org**

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

June 22, 2017

Dear Senate Majority Leader McConnell, Senate Minority Leader Schumer, and Senators:

As organizations working to ensure that families and communities have access to safe and healthy environments, we recognize that preventive health services and increased access to insurance coverage are critical to promoting public health, especially in the low-income and front line communities that often bear the brunt of environmental pollution. Therefore, on behalf of our millions of members, activists and supporters nationwide, we urge you to support communities and populations that are at risk from environmental health harms by opposing the repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and maintaining funding for frontline service providers, like Planned Parenthood.

While the health impacts of industrial pollution, environmental disasters, and climate change affect our society as a whole, low-income communities and people of color frequently bear the heaviest burdens.¹ It is critical to preserve providers working within these frontline communities, especially those who are willing to act during environmental disasters. Examples include Planned Parenthood Michigan—which provided water source screenings and joined efforts to pass out bottled water during the Flint water crisis, which continues to harm the community today—and the Planned Parenthood program in southern Florida, which reached over 30,000 people in minority communities with information and emergency kits to combat the risk of being exposed to the Zika virus. These communities and the women who live within them face a greater risk of getting sick, losing their livelihoods, living in poverty, and being displaced when weather disasters strike. These communities are also the least likely to have affordable access to the healthcare they need to discover early warning signs of illnesses—like those caused or exacerbated by environmental factors—and get the treatments they need after illness has occurred.

¹ See, e.g. RJ Brulle and DN Pellow, *Environmental Justice: Human Health and Environmental Inequalities* 27 Annual Rev Pub Health 103 (2006).

Since enactment, the ACA has helped change that dynamic, with millions of Americans having been covered under the ACA's provisions. The ACA affords patients access and health coverage to Americans who are underserved including people of color, women, and families in rural communities.

These are some of the important benefits provided under the Affordable Care Act:

- All Americans have access to preventive services without copays, which is particularly helpful to women who should receive regular screenings and to people of color in frontline communities who are at a higher risk for conditions like cancer, asthma, and heart disease—caused or worsened by pollution.
- Women gained direct access to Ob-Gyn providers including health centers such as Planned Parenthood.
- Americans are no longer denied for coverage based on preexisting conditions coupled with a prohibition from setting limits on coverage including annual and lifetime limits.
- Children have access to programs proven to reduce their risk of long-term disability from lead poisoning, obesity, and chronic disease.
- Communities have a defense against emerging infectious threats like Zika virus and outbreaks of foodborne disease.
- Communities bearing the largest burden of diseases associated with pollution (like asthma), communities of color, and people experiencing material poverty have increased access to insurance.

Repealing the ACA would be a severe blow to public health, leaving all Americans worse-off, and the burden will hit historically marginalized communities hardest, further increasing health disparities. Repealing the ACA, scaling down access to Medicaid, and “defunding” Planned Parenthood would result in over 23 million Americans losing access to health care.

Repealing the ACA would also more strongly impact women's access to healthcare, as before the law millions of women were denied coverage because of pre-existing conditions including breast cancer or pregnancy. Early detection of cancer can be life-saving, especially for women of color who have higher rates of mortality when diagnosed with cancer. Similarly, women who become pregnant should have access to screenings throughout the pregnancy, especially if faced with environmental concerns such as lead poisoning, air pollution, or other factors that may cause them to have higher-risk pregnancies. Prior to the ACA those plans that women could use were sometimes out of reach, as some were forced to pay more for insurance just because they were women, and now this legislation would take away maternity care. This legislation would be a disaster for women.

Beyond efforts to remove these benefits, there is also an effort to defund Planned Parenthood, often the only healthcare provider available to low-income women across the country. Of the

government funding Planned Parenthood receives, roughly 75 percent comes in the form of Medicaid reimbursements to cover medical services for low-income patients, and the rest is for Title X family planning services that are mainly claimed by low-income or minority individuals. Women, especially in low-income communities, rely on access to Planned Parenthood to receive the high-quality healthcare they deserve, and Planned Parenthood's services help to improve health outcomes. For example, black women experience more than twice the death rate of white women from cervical cancer, a preventable disease, and research indicates that greater access to screenings would improve these outcomes.² Of Planned Parenthood's 2.4 million patients annually, approximately 15% are African American and 23% are Latino.³ Defunding Planned Parenthood would be yet another blow to low-income and frontline communities by blocking access to over 615,000 breast and cervical cancer screenings and prevention, eliminating family planning counseling and contraception to over two million patients, and preventing over 4.2 million tests and treatments for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV tests annually.⁴ Everyone should have a right to quality and affordable patient care.

Millions of people in this country would be at grave risk by the repeal of the Affordable Care Act and the systematic defunding of Planned Parenthood and its health centers. Furthermore, Senators are writing this legislation in back rooms, avoiding the normal legislative process to avoid public scrutiny of their actions. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to oppose any efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and defund Planned Parenthood.

Sincerely,

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² Beavis, A. L., Gravitt, P. E. and Rositch, A. F. (2017), Hysterectomy-corrected cervical cancer mortality rates reveal a larger racial disparity in the United States. *Cancer*, 123: 1044–1050. doi:10.1002/cncr.30507

³ "This is Who We Are", Planned Parenthood Federation of America, (July 2016)
https://www.plannedparenthood.org/files/6814/6833/9709/20160711_FS_General_d1.pdf

⁴ Services, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, (July 2016)
https://www.plannedparenthood.org/files/1914/6833/9710/20160711_FS_Services_d2.pdf