

Dear Representative,

We, the undersigned medical and public health organizations, stand in strong opposition to the addition of any provision to legislation to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that would interfere in the relationship between students and health care providers by limiting access to information or health care services. On February 26th, 2015, during consideration of H.R. 5, the Student Success Act, a politically motivated amendment was added to the Manager's Amendment that would do just that.

The amendment was a misguided attempt to ban school-based health centers from sharing age-appropriate, medically accurate information about the full range of reproductive health care options, including abortion. Research has shown that access to comprehensive and medically accurate sex education and contraception enables young people to make healthy decisions, ultimately leading to better health outcomes. This helps young people delay having sex, use condoms and contraception when they do become sexually active, and reduces teen pregnancy, birth, and abortion. Young people need – and deserve – accurate, unbiased, and trusted communications with health care professionals.

Additionally, the patient-provider relationship is essential to the delivery of safe and high-quality medical care, and should be protected from unnecessary government intrusion. Efforts to legislate elements of patient care and counseling can drive a wedge between a patient and their health care provider, be that a physician, school-based health provider, certified nurse-midwife, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant. Congress should refrain from passing laws that interfere with the ability of health care providers to have open, honest and confidential communications with their patients that address the full spectrum of reproductive health care options.

Laws that inappropriately interfere in the relationship between a patient and a provider are ill-advised. This type of legislative interference affects all health care providers, not just school-based health care providers. Such legislation would prevent providers from offering the best evidence-based care to their patients.

In addition to the language included in the Managers Amendment, a similarly misguided amendment was submitted to the rules committee that would have prohibited federal funds from going to any school that provides emergency contraception or a prescription for it, on the premises. While the amendment was ruled not in order at the time, we stand in opposition to any further attempt to curtail young women's access to the full range of reproductive care, including emergency contraception.

As the House works to improve the nation's educational system, it must not be at the expense of the health of young people. Your vigilance in protecting the integrity of the patient-provider relationship, as well as the availability of science-based health care is critically important. We look forward to working with you to ensure that our nation's young people receive the information and tools they need to make responsible and healthy decisions.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth
American Medical Women's Association
American Public Health Association
Black Women's Health Imperative
Catholics for Choice
Center for Reproductive Rights
Family Planning Nurse Practitioners
Feminist Majority
Healthy Teen Network
Institute for Science and Human Values, Inc
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Abortion Federation
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Coalition for LGBT Health
National Council of Jewish Women
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Health Law Program
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women's Law Center
Our Bodies Ourselves
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Population Connection Action Fund
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Reproductive Health Technologies Project
School-Based Health Alliance
Secular Coalition for America
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
Society of Family Planning
Southwest Women's Law Center
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
Women's Reproductive Rights Assistance Project