

July 30, 2014

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Shaheen:

As organizations committed to protecting and improving women's health and rights, we write in support of the Access to Contraception for Women Servicemembers and Dependents Act of 2014. This bill ensures that all servicemembers and their dependents who rely on the military for health care have comprehensive contraceptive coverage and family planning counseling.

Women play a vital role in the U.S. military and currently constitute 16 percent of all active duty and reserve members of the military.ⁱ This bill would ensure that confidential, comprehensive, and medically accurate family-planning counseling becomes a guaranteed health service for servicewomen, and is offered by medical providers that have the most up-to-date, evidenced-based information regarding the full range of contraceptive methods available.

Ninety-seven percent of servicewomen are of reproductive ageⁱⁱ and studies suggest that servicemembers could benefit from receiving comprehensive family planning counseling.ⁱⁱⁱ Additionally, servicewomen deployed overseas are often stationed in environments with unique challenges that require additional considerations in choosing the best contraception method. Meeting the needs of servicewomen's reproductive-health care is critical to ensure military readiness and mission accomplishment.

Unintended pregnancy can be prevented through comprehensive education and family-planning counseling. This bill would guarantee that such counseling is available at various points in a servicewoman's career, including during predeployment and deployment health-care visits, giving women the tools necessary to make informed decisions on whether, and when, to have a child.

Further, this bill requires TRICARE to offer insurance coverage of all FDA-approved methods of contraception with no cost-sharing. With this provision, the nearly 5 million women eligible for Department of Defense-based health insurance^{iv} will have the same birth control coverage as federal employees and those who rely on private insurance coverage. Currently, active duty military have no cost-sharing for any prescriptions,

although non-active duty military and dependents must pay cost-sharing for birth control acquired outside a Military Treatment Facility (MTF).

This bill would also make available at MTFs a range of FDA-approved contraceptive methods, providing a critical health service to the high number — 41 percent — of deployed servicewomen who have difficulty obtaining a refill for their ideal contraception method.^v

Finally, this bill improves servicewomen’s access to emergency contraception (EC) in two ways: first by codifying Department of Defense regulations that health-care providers at MTFs provide survivors of sexual assault with information regarding emergency contraception. Second, the bill requires MTFs to offer a sexual assault survivor EC upon her request.

We believe it is the duty of our military to provide the highest quality health care to all servicemembers and military dependents, women included, and therefore strongly support the Access to Contraception for Women Servicemembers and Dependents Act of 2014.

Thank you,

American Civil Liberties Union
Catholics for Choice
Center for Inquiry
Center for Reproductive Rights
Episcopal Women’s Caucus
Freedom From Religion Foundation
Freethought Society
General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church
Hispanic American Freethinkers
Ibis Reproductive Health
Institute for Science and Human Values, Inc.
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Women International
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Abortion Federation
National Council of Jewish Women
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women’s Health Network
National Women’s Law Center

Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Population Connection Action Fund
Population Institute
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Reproductive Health Technologies Project
Service Women's Action Network
Society for Humanistic Judaism
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual
Women of Reform Judaism

ⁱ U.S. Department of Defense: *2012 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community*.
http://www.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2012_Demographics_Report.pdf. (last visited July 15, 2014).

ⁱⁱ Grindlay K, et. al., *Abortion Restrictions in the U.S. Military: Voices from Women Deployed Overseas*. *Women Health Issues*. 121, (2011).

ⁱⁱⁱ Manski R, et. al., *Reproductive Health Access Among Deployed Servicewomen: A Qualitative Study*. *Military Medicine*. 179, (2014).

^{iv} U.S. Department of Defense: *Evaluation of the TRICARE Program: Fiscal Year 2014 Report to Congress* (March 5, 2014).

^v Grindlay K., *Unintended Pregnancy Among Active-Duty Women in the United States Military* *Obstetrics & Gynecology*. 121, (2013).