

For Immediate Release

Thursday, March 1, 2012

Washington, DC - Today, the Senate tabled Senator Blunt's (R-MO) amendment to the surface transportation bill (S. 1813), which would have allowed any employer or insurer opposing any medical procedure or service - including contraception - to deny insurance coverage for that service on the grounds of religious or moral beliefs.

"The Blunt amendment would have gone beyond existing conscience protections and would have allowed employers to restrict access to a number of health care services for their employees, including contraception and screening and treatment for HIV/AIDS," said Emily Spitzer, NHeLP executive director. "We are pleased that the Senate - through the leadership of many women's health care champions - defeated this dangerous measure."

In January 2011, the Obama Administration announced a final rule implementing the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) requirements that all new insurance plans cover women's preventive health services, including contraception, without cost-sharing. Religious organizations, such as churches, are exempted from the requirement to provide coverage for contraception if they meet certain requirements. In addition, under the Administration's recently announced religious accommodation, insurance companies will directly provide coverage for contraception, at no additional cost, if a religiously affiliated non-profit institution raises an objection to providing coverage.

"An estimated 20 million women will benefit from the ACA's expanded access to essential preventive health care, including access to family planning services and screening and counselling for cancer and sexually transmitted diseases," said Susan Berke Fogel, NHeLP director of reproductive health. "Unfortunately Senator Blunt and other members of Congress continue to attempt to undermine the ACA and restrict, rather than expand, access to affordable care."

In recent weeks, members of Congress opposed to the contraceptive coverage requirements have introduced a number of bills (S. 1467, S. 2043/H.R. 3897 and S. 2092) that would allow any individual employer - based on its personal beliefs - to refuse to cover contraceptives in their employer-sponsored health insurance plan. NHeLP opposes these bills and is actively engaged in efforts to ensure that all women have access to comprehensive health care, regardless of where they work.

Documented in NHeLP's 2010 report, [Health Care Refusals: Undermining Quality Care for Women](#), medical standards of care require that providers offer women with certain health conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, epilepsy, lupus, obesity, and cancer, information and services necessary to prevent pregnancy. Refusal clauses, such as the Blunt amendment and other recent legislative proposals, conflict with these professionally developed and accepted medical standards of care and have adverse health consequences for women and their families.