



**H. 721 Medicaid Expansion Act  
House Health Care Committee  
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January 31, 2024**

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care to more than 16,000 people in Vermont at seven health centers located in Burlington, Williston, St. Johnsbury, Barre, White River Junction, Rutland, and Brattleboro and virtually through our telehealth program. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, sexually transmitted infections testing and treatment, cancer screenings, abortion care, as well as a variety of limited primary care services. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of their ability to pay, and 54% of our patients have low incomes (defined as less than twice the Federal Poverty level). Last fiscal year, we provided \$802,000 in free and discounted care to our communities in Vermont.

As a mission-driven health care provider, we fundamentally believe everyone should be able to access affordable, high quality sexual and reproductive health care in their communities, no matter where they live or how much money they make, and we advocate for policies that help make this vision a reality.

The irony of our work is that as this Legislature and Vermont voters were voting to codify access to reproductive health care into our constitution, Planned Parenthood was forced to close 5 health centers across the state (Newport, St. Albans, Bennington, Middlebury and Hyde Park). While our right to reproductive care in Vermont is the most protected it has ever been and others are looking to us as the model of reproductive access and care, the sad reality is that our access to that same care is the lowest it has been in recent memory.

Sexual and reproductive health care providers play a unique role in the state's health care system. First, we sit on the frontlines. We see all patients regardless of their ability to pay and are an integral part of the state's safety net. We provide time sensitive care, reserving time on our schedule each day for same-day appointments because much of our care begins with addressing an acute need - a patient's birth control prescription is about to expire, they felt a lump in their breast, they are



experiencing painful periods, or they are worried they have an infection. . Patients also turn to Planned Parenthood for primary care services, such as blood pressure checks, anemia testing, and screenings for cholesterol, diabetes, and thyroid. We are often the first and only health care provider a patient may see in a year due to the patient being uninsured or having a low income. We also screen patients for mental health, safety and intimate partner violence, substance use disorders, and other social and mental determinants of health. Because of the unique relationship we have with our patient population, patients are much more likely to disclose these deeply personal health issues to our staff. Patients have a deep level of trust in us because of the high quality care we provide and the high level of honesty we offer as a sexual and reproductive health provider. Planned Parenthood is in an incomparable position to screen and educate patients, their families, and our local communities about behavioral health and the importance of both prevention and treatment. It's this trusting relationship that has led to an expansion of care to meet the needs of our patients more directly. The reality is that, today, a patient walking through our doors receives far more than a prescription to birth control or a Pap test.

We fully support the sections of this bill that expand patient access to Medicaid. Thanks to the VT Access Plan, which extends Medicaid benefits for family planning services, we already see patients on Medicaid up to 209% FPL. Patients that fall between 209%, and this bill's proposed cap of 312% in 2030, often utilize our sliding scale fee structure to offset high deductible costs with low and no cost care. We will always provide care to anyone who needs it, regardless of how or what they can pay.

However, the reality is that ensuring Vermonters have access to this essential health care is getting harder for us. Even with the generous support of our donors, we are looking at a 3.9M deficit in our 2024 budget (40-50% is VT driven) and are making tough choices about the capacity of the care we can provide. Across the board, the operational costs to staff and maintain health care facilities has risen dramatically due to inflation, staffing shortages, and stagnant reimbursement rates, and Planned Parenthood is not immune. This is especially true for health care systems that operate in rural areas, like many of our health centers. We are here today to ask this committee to explicitly include reproductive and gender-affirming care in Section 5 to be included in the 125% provider rate increases. We did some modeling, and even without increasing the percentage of patients on Medicaid we provide care for, we estimate this would generate about an additional 1.5M in annual revenue for our



Vermont health centers. This would go a long way in shoring up our financial gaps and ensuring that we can continue providing care at the seven health centers we still operate. I will also note that this ask has less of a Vermont impact than it would for any other services, since family planning has an enhanced federal match rate of 9 to 1.

We would also like to ask this committee to please consider an earlier effective date for these provider rate increased specifically for family planning services given our already expanded Medicaid patient population. If not in this bill, I would be most happy to come discuss our needs during your committee's budget discussions as well. But the bottom line is truly that our health centers and the Vermonters who rely on us for their health care needs cannot afford to wait until 2026 or beyond before we see these increases in our reimbursement rates.

***Planned Parenthood of Northern New England (PPNNE)** is the largest provider of reproductive and sexual health care across the state of Vermont. We serve **patients** through 7 health centers in St. Johnsbury, Rutland, Brattleboro, Barre, Burlington, Williston, and White River Junction and virtually through our Telehealth program. Last year we saw more than 16,000 patients at these sites. PPNNE was named a 2021 Guardian of Excellence Award® winner by Press Ganey, the national leader in health care consumer and workforce engagement. Press Ganey recognizes PPNNE as a top-performing health care organization, achieving the 95th percentile or above for performance in patient experience, out of more than 20,000 medical practices.*