

House Appropriations Public Hearing, February 16, 2017

Testimony - Lyn Blackwell, E. Montpelier, VT

I am here tonight as a concerned citizen and former trustee of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England. As you may know, Planned Parenthood affiliates around the country are facing an imminent threat to crucial sources of federal funding: Title X and Medicaid, both of which provide family planning services for low-income patients.

In Vermont, this could result in a 40% reduction in revenue as well as an increase in the cost of contraceptives that are dispensed at health centers. I am disheartened by the real possibility that PPNNE may have to close several of the 12 health centers it operates throughout the state. How will the state replace these essential services that have provided high quality, accessible, and confidential reproductive care for so many Vermonters for over fifty years?

When I moved to Vermont in 1971, I had no idea what a good decision I had made. Planned Parenthood Association of Vermont had recently begun providing family planning services with a minimal staff, and I volunteered to help out. At the time President Nixon had just signed a bipartisan bill to initiate Title X; both parties believed that birth control and reproductive care were essential to creating healthy families. And in 1972 the federal government began reimbursing state expenses for similar services through Medicaid.

Since then, Vermont has been a leader in continuing to prioritize family planning by supporting Planned Parenthood as the organization expanded throughout the state and region. I am grateful for that support; I am grateful that I

live in a state where politics has not disrupted the notion that both women and men need a full range of accessible reproductive care; I am grateful that the Vermont Legislature funds the Access Plan, which expanded the number of patients that can receive free services; and I am especially proud that I live in one of only four states that now guarantees contraceptive coverage, including vasectomies, in Vermont statutes.

Thank you for all that you have done to promote healthy families. As you face this year's difficult budget choices, I hope you will keep these priorities in the forefront and help us maintain these essential services despite what happens in Washington, DC.