

Cosponsor the Prevention First Act (S. 21)

March 12, 2009

Dear Senator:



On behalf of the 100,000 bipartisan members of the American Association of University Women, I urge you to **cosponsor the Prevention First Act (S. 21)**. This bill sends a strong signal that we are serious about reproductive health care for women; family planning services and pregnancy care for those most in need; equity in coverage for and access to contraceptives; and pregnancy and STI prevention for adolescents.

Rates of pregnancy¹ and sexually transmitted infections² among minors in the United States remain among the highest of the developed countries. Half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended, more than three million each year, and almost half of those end in abortion.³ Between 1994 and 2001, the overall downward trend in unintended pregnancy rates stagnated.⁴

AAUW believes that there must be adequate supports in place to ensure that all women have access to the preventative health care they need. One vital component is ensuring that all women have complete control of their reproductive health over their entire life-span. Family planning increases educational and employment opportunities and improves women's ability to support themselves and their families.

The Prevention First Act identifies a number of areas where health care specifically from women must be expanded. Public health programs like Medicaid and Title X provide high-quality family planning services and other preventive health care to underinsured or uninsured individuals who cannot afford and may otherwise lack access to health care. Many poor and low-income women cannot afford contraceptive services and supplies on their own. These women have recently seen their Medicaid programs cut, putting them at risk of losing coverage for important family planning services. Further, women are regularly confronted with limited access to emergency contraception and even refused insurance coverage for basic birth control. The comprehensive solutions in the Prevention First Act will not only address these problems and decrease the spread of STIs, reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, and contribute to the overall health of women, but they will also save money.⁵

The Prevention First Act also includes the establishment of a federally-funded comprehensive sex education program. Abstinence-only sex educational programs censor information on contraception, pregnancy prevention, and sexually transmitted diseases. Because the United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy⁶ and sexually transmitted infection⁷ in the developed world, AAUW supports comprehensive sexuality education or "abstinence plus" programs that include information about both abstinence and contraception. In the best curriculums, abstinence is always stressed, but information with regards to delaying sexual activity, as well as ways to deal with peer pressure on the issue must also be included. Such programs are critical in helping to combat teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and are an important part of the Prevention First Act.

Again, I urge you to **cosponsor the Prevention First Act (S. 21)**. To become a cosponsor contact Carolyn Gluck (202/224-3542 or Carolyn_Gluck@reid.senate.gov) in Sen. Reid's office. Cosponsorship and votes associated with this issue may be included in AAUW's Congressional Voting Record for the 111th Congress. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Tracy Sherman, government relations manager, at 202/785-7730.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa M. Maatz".

Lisa M. Maatz
Director, Public Policy and Government Relations

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- ¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (September 2006). *Adolescent Reproductive Health: Teen Pregnancy*. Retrieved January 7, 2009, from <http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/AdolescentReproHealth/index.htm>.
- ² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health, The National Women's Health Information Center. (May 2005) *Sexually Transmitted Diseases: Overview*. Retrieved January 7, 2009, from <http://www.4woman.gov/faq/stdsgen.htm>.
- ³ Boonstra, Heather. "Emergency Contraception: The Need to Increase Public Awareness." *The Guttmacher Report*.
- ⁴ Gold, Rachel Benson. (February 2009). *Next Steps for America's Family Planning Program: Leveraging the Potential of Medicaid and Title X in an Evolving Health Care System*. Retrieved March 4, 2009 from http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/2009/02/17/next_steps_complete.pdf.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (2004). *Teen Birth Rates: How Does the United States Compare?* Retrieved December 19, 2007, from http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/reading/pdf/inatl_comparisons2006.pdf.
- ⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health, The National Women's Health Information Center. (May 2005). *Sexually Transmitted Diseases: Overview*. Retrieved December 19, 2007, from <http://www.4woman.gov/faq/stdsgen.htm>.