

May 5, 2011

The Honorable Vincent Gray
John A. Wilson Building
Suite 504
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Mayor:

As prochoice organizations that are religious, religiously affiliated, and faith-centered, we strive to represent the millions of people of faith committed to women's health and reproductive choices. We were so grateful to see your brave and valiant affirmation of the right of the citizens of the District of Columbia to use their own resources to provide access to comprehensive reproductive health care options, including abortion. We know that the women of DC are thankful to have a leader willing to fight for their rights to make the decision that is best for their families, regardless of their circumstance.

Striving for social justice and ensuring equal access to affordable, comprehensive reproductive and sexual healthcare options are at the core of the common principles our organizations share. Abortion care is an integral element of healthcare. The deal struck by leaders in the federal government to end the budget impasse created significant barriers to women's access to reproductive health options in the District and will make it harder for DC's women to make their own reproductive choices based on their individual beliefs and consciences.

As faith-centered organizations, we are committed to defending the most marginalized and the most vulnerable of our society, especially those with limited financial means. We affirm women as moral agents who have the capacity, right and responsibility to make their own decisions about sexuality, reproduction and their families' health. Bargaining away these rights by banning the use of local funds to pay for abortions discriminates against women, especially women of color and lower-income women, who are disproportionately affected by the ban.

Some conservative faith leaders, who would admonish you for your actions, deny the reality of what many living in DC must face to care for themselves and their families every day. Reciting statistics, percentages and platitudes turns us away from the human face of the women who must make these decisions every day in the District of Columbia and across the US. Rather than cursing the situation and those fighting to solve it, these critics should be working in tandem with leaders like you to support and uphold the social safety net systems which help each woman make decisions about her own health care and about how best to care for her family, guided by her own conscience, her personal circumstances, and her own moral or faith tradition.

Be assured that those who have spoken against you and your response to this DC funding ban do not speak for the majority of Americans, including those from a vast diversity of faiths, who support a woman's right to choose and her access to options which allow her to exercise that choice. Promoting and preserving social justice; ensuring that the marginalized or most vulnerable in our society have equal access to health and human services; and affirming the moral capacity and the human right of individuals to make moral decisions about their own lives—including choices about whether and when to become pregnant or to end a pregnancy—these are all part of the work our organizations do every day. We thank you for doing the same with your courageous stand.

We applaud you and the DC Council Members who stood with you, and renew our commitment to help you in your efforts to ensure greater access to comprehensive reproductive health care services for all women in DC. We stand with you as you continue to fight for social justice and the rights of the women of the District of Columbia and their families. Please contact Sara Hutchinson, domestic program director at Catholics for Choice, at shutchinson@catholicsforchoice.org or 202-986-6093 if there is any other assistance we may provide to help you in reaching our common goals.

Sincerely,

Catholics for Choice
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc. (Greater Washington Area Chapter)
Jewish Women International
Lutheran Women's Caucus
Methodist Federation for Social Action
National Council of Jewish Women
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
United Church of Christ - Justice and Witness Ministries

cc: Members of the Council of the District of Columbia