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Maine Family Planning Will Fight Domestic Gag Rule

Maine's Title X grantee will seek a preliminary injunction to stop rule from going into effect

AUGUSTA – Maine Family Planning (MFP), the state's oldest and largest reproductive health care organization and its sole Title X grantee, vigorously opposes the devastating rule changes that were unveiled Friday by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Known as the Domestic Gag Rule because it restricts referrals for abortion and imposes other limitations on the speech and activities of organizations involved in Title X care, this policy:

- compromises science and medical ethics;
- interferes with the provider-patient relationship; and
- erects barriers between low-income, rural, and LGBTQ+ Mainers and the comprehensive reproductive health care they need and deserve.

Due to the unique harm this rule will cause to the people of Maine, MFP will file a case represented by the Center for Reproductive Rights and Covington & Burling LLP, and seek a preliminary injunction to prevent the Rule from taking effect.

Among other things, the Rule would severely limit, and in many circumstances ban, referral for abortion services, as well as open discussion about abortion services between medical professionals and their patients. It also requires strict physical and financial separation between abortion services and Title X services. These provisions would place a significant burden on people seeking safe and legal abortion care in Maine.

The Gag Rule seems designed to sabotage the Title X program – which provides affordable birth control, STD testing and treatment, and cancer screenings to 4 million people nationwide, annually – as it was intended: To ensure that all people, regardless of how much they earn, can afford high quality family planning care.

In Maine, MFP works with partners like Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and community health centers to provide Title X services to more than 23,800 people each year. In Maine, where we grapple with poverty, substance use disorder, and a largely rural environment, Title X clinics have long played a key role in alleviating barriers to health care access.

MFP also provides abortion care as part of the full spectrum of reproductive health care. In accordance with the law, abortion services are provided without using any federal resources, including Title X funds. We consider the provision of such comprehensive care central to our identity. However, the Rule makes fulfilling our organizational mission practically untenable, by banning Title X funds from going to organizations that also offer abortion care.

“The Domestic Gag Rule runs counter to everything we stand for as a reproductive health care organization,” said George A. Hill, president and CEO of Maine Family Planning. “We are going to court to make sure Maine patients and providers aren't harmed by this blatantly ideological attack on health care for low-income people.”

While MFP battles the Gag Rule, Maine's Title X network – including 18 MFP clinics spread throughout the state – will strive to continue offering the same compassionate, comprehensive, and expert care that our patients rely on us for.