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**As of January 2008*

Jodi Magee
Executive Director

11 December 2008

President-elect Barack H. Obama
Presidential Transition Team
Washington, DC 20270

Sent via email

Dear Mr. President-elect,

I write as chair of Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health (PRCH), an organization committed to bringing medical facts and patients' needs to discussions about reproductive health. Like many of the physicians I represent, I have treated thousands of women, seeing firsthand how contraception and abortion are critical to keeping their families healthy and strong.

For too many women, these essential services are hard to come by. PRCH is committed to making quality comprehensive reproductive healthcare a reality for everyone, and wants to help you toward this goal.

As a physician-led organization, PRCH is uniquely qualified to promote federal healthcare policies informed by evidence-based science and motivated by a desire to improve public health. PRCH is the only national organization bringing a unified physician voice to Congress, the media, and the public in matters of family planning, abortion, adolescent pregnancy, and reproductive healthcare.

When it comes to the rights and abilities of Americans to control their reproductive health, PRCH is determined to ensure that medicine and science prevail over political posturing. For the past eight years, we have worked diligently to fight the Bush administration's repeated disregard of scientific facts and a policy agenda driven by political ideology and religious zealotry. Our efforts have led our physicians and staff to your office a number of times during your tenure as senator, and we appreciate the support of your staff, most especially Dr. Dora Hughes, your Health Policy Advisor.

President-elect Obama, you can reverse the damage caused by the Bush administration. You can restore America's standing in the world as a leader on reproductive healthcare. You can make policy that recognizes birth control as basic healthcare. You can restore scientific integrity to decisions about sex education, teen pregnancy, abortion, and every other aspect of reproductive healthcare.

I write to offer you PRCH's medical experience and expertise, and to urge you to make access to reproductive healthcare a priority for your administration.

We realize that repealing the Global Gag Rule is one of your top priorities. Along with this, our physicians consider the following three actions to be the most important reproductive healthcare issues you can address immediately while in office:

1. Restore affordable birth control.

Your bill, the Prevention Through Affordable Access Act (S. 2347/H.R. 4054), sought to restore the nominal pricing exception that has previously allowed many women to access contraception at a price they could afford. Currently, 62% of women in their childbearing years (age 15-44) are using contraception.ⁱ The medical community is committed to the concept of prevention. Our members see daily how access to contraception keeps women and their families healthy, whether they are in college or out in the workforce. As you know, correcting this issue would cost the taxpayers and the government nothing, yet would put birth control within reach for many women who otherwise are unable to afford it.

President-elect Obama, we thank you for your leadership on this issue in the Senate. As president, you can restore birth control prices to a more affordable level by simply having your new Secretary of Health and Human Services issue a regulation to reclassify college health centers and safety-net clinics as eligible for discounted birth control.

2. Ensure that the proposed Health and Human Services regulations are not implemented.

In August, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) published proposed regulationsⁱⁱ that, if implemented, would broaden the scope of existing federal refusal laws by allowing healthcare providers to withhold medical information based on their religious or moral beliefs. This would also open the door for hospitals and physicians to deny access to or information about contraception—even when those treatments would improve a patient’s health or save her life. The proposed regulations are unnecessary, would damage the integrity of the relationship between healthcare providers and patients, and would undermine the ability of women and families to make informed reproductive healthcare choices.

Physicians have an obligation to provide patients with all relevant medically accurate information necessary to make fully informed healthcare decisions. Physicians have the legal and ethical obligation to obtain their patients’ informed consent to treatment after providing the patient’s full range of options. The right of patients to access information and services should not be compromised by a physician’s religious or moral values.

President-elect Obama, if these regulations are finalized prior to the start of your administration, you can immediately suspend, repeal, or amend them through your Secretary of HHS.

3. Appoint physicians to agencies, councils, and committees who are committed to evidence-based decisions.

The reproductive health policies of the Bush administration were driven by ideology, with a disregard for objective scientific evidence. PRCH bases its work on independent research published by top peer-reviewed journals and conducted by scientists who are the authorities in their fields. Our membership includes physicians in obstetrics and gynecology, family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, and adolescent medicine, as well as many other specialties. We come from varied professional arenas, such as public health, private practice, university faculty,

and government agencies around the country. Many of us have been heads of medical organizations, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Psychiatric Association. We are deans of public health and medical schools, and top-tier faculty at leading academic institutions. We would be happy to make recommendations for any relevant openings in federal agencies.

President-elect Obama, ensure that the government doesn't promulgate biased information about abortion, contraception, and sexual health. When looking for medical professionals to fill positions, we ask that you appoint physicians and other providers who are committed to evidence-based practice.

We also realize many issues do not lend themselves to a quick fix. Below are our top three issues that may take more time and/or have fiscal impact, but are vital to the nation's health.

1. Make emergency contraception (EC) available to all women of reproductive age.

It is imperative that women who experience contraceptive failure, have unprotected intercourse, or are survivors of sexual assault have immediate access to emergency contraceptive pills. Nevertheless, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has repeatedly refused to make emergency contraception available without a prescription to women of all ages, even though its own scientific review staff has made that recommendation.

President-elect Obama, as president you can expand access to emergency contraceptive pills through various federal agencies: direct the Department of Defense to add EC to the military's basic core formulary, which would require EC to be available at all military healthcare facilities; direct the Justice Department to include EC in its guidelines for treatment of sexual assault; and instruct the FDA to re-evaluate the scientific data regarding the age restriction on over-the-counter access to EC.

2. Defund abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and fund the provision of medically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education.

Despite numerous studies finding that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are ineffective, the federal government authorized \$963 million between 2001 and 2007 to promote them. Comprehensive sexuality education offers the most effective strategy for giving young people the knowledge and skills necessary to make responsible decisions about sexual activity.

Sexuality education should be taught in ways that are age- and experience-appropriate throughout a child's education, and include medically accurate information related to reproductive biology, relationship-building, cultural awareness, sexual abstinence, sexual responsibility, contraceptives, birth control options, and other issues aimed at prevention of unwanted pregnancies and sexual transmission of infections.

As president, please include funding for comprehensive sex education in your first budget and defund abstinence-only programs.

3. Direct Congress to repeal the Hyde Amendment.

Seven million women of reproductive age are enrolled in the Medicaid program.ⁱⁱⁱ As Medicaid recipients, they are eligible for assistance with the medical care pregnancy and birth require.

However, if a woman receiving Medicaid assistance chooses to end her pregnancy, she will not receive coverage because of the so-called Hyde Amendment.

Abortion is one of the safest and most common medical procedures in the U.S., and is part of the continuum of women's reproductive healthcare. Women on Medicaid deserve access to the full range of reproductive healthcare services, regardless of their income level.

As medical professionals, we strongly support equal access to care for women of all income levels and geographic locations. When a woman's reproductive decisions are dependent solely upon her bank account balance, the health of both the woman and her family suffers. The Hyde Amendment is poor medicine and poor public policy. It does nothing to prevent unintended pregnancies and fails to protect women's health.

President-elect Obama, the Hyde Amendment has punished low income women for thirty years. It is time for a change. Please work with Congress to end this and ensure that women at all income levels have access to a medical procedure that is legal, safe, and common.

These are all essential issues to address, the majority of which have little or no economic impact. We are also pleased to know that healthcare reform is a part of your agenda. As physicians, we are acutely aware that good reproductive health is essential to women's overall health. Access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare must be a core ingredient of any healthcare plan.

We must ensure that every woman and every girl can get the reproductive healthcare she needs. We must put science into sex education at every school. We must not force a low-income woman to carry a pregnancy to term when the pregnancy threatens her health and future fertility. Please allow women to control their own reproductive lives.

We can help bring medical expertise to your work. PRCH is available as a resource to you as you prepare for the challenge ahead, and we look forward to working with your administration. Jodi Magee, our executive director, will be in contact with your staff to see what services and information we can provide. If you need to reach her in the meantime, you can do so at 646-649-9910 or jodi@prch.org.

Yours respectfully,



Suzanne Poppema
Chair

cc: Dora Hughes, MD
Melody Barnes (*hand-delivered*)

ⁱ Mosher WD et al., Use of contraception and use of family planning services in the United States: 1982-2002, Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics, No. 350. 2004.

ⁱⁱ Fed. Reg. 73, No 166, August 26, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ Boonstra, Heather, The Heart of the Matter: Public Funding of Abortion for Poor Women in the United States, *Guttmacher Policy Review*, Winter 2007.