

September 30, 2011

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand  
478 Russell Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

On behalf of the below signed organizations dedicated to advancing women's health, we thank you for your tremendous leadership to expand women's access to healthcare services. We are especially grateful to you for introducing the Military Access to Reproductive Care and Health (MARCH) for Military Women Act (S. 1214). We greatly appreciate and applaud your role in bringing attention to the plight of our servicewomen.

We hope that you will use your considerable influence, as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, to bring these issues to the Senate floor during consideration of the FY12 National Defense Authorization Act. This is vital because, as you know, more than 400,000 women currently serve in the military. At a time when servicewomen are putting their lives at risk to preserve our rights and freedom, we should not deny them access to the same health care available to the civilians they protect.

We strongly support the MARCH Act because it would fix the military's ban on abortion coverage in cases of rape and incest. We are very troubled that federal statute limits the Department of Defense to providing coverage for abortion care *only* when the pregnant woman's life is in danger. Unlike the other federal bans on abortion coverage, the military ban lacks an exception for cases of rape and incest. As a result, servicewomen and the wives and daughters of servicemen who rely on the military for health care coverage must pay out of their own pocket for abortion care after being raped. Restoring abortion coverage to our military women and family members who are survivors of rape and incest would bring the Department of Defense health care coverage in line with the policy that governs other federal programs, such as Medicaid and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program.

We also strongly support the MARCH Act because it would fix another harmful and unnecessary additional barrier to abortion care that military women and families confront when serving overseas. Under current federal law, a woman can use her *own* private funds to access abortion services at a military treatment facility *only if* she is a victim of rape or incest *and for no other reason*. This means that a servicewoman or military family member who chooses not to disclose a rape or who faces an unintended pregnancy cannot use even her own money to obtain abortion care. This private funding ban imposes grave health risks and leaves servicewomen and their families far worse off than civilian women. For example, a servicewoman serving abroad who is prohibited

from accessing abortion services on a military base may have to receive care at a local facility that is substandard or unsafe.

New York State has a longstanding tradition of protecting the rights and freedoms of all of its citizens; and New York leaders have long championed laws and policies that advance these rights -- including women's reproductive health choices. Refusing New York servicewomen access to comprehensive reproductive health care is not only a rejection of New York State's tradition of leadership, it is a retreat from our values. We urge you to continue to champion the reproductive health needs of our women in uniform, and the military wives and daughters who sacrifice so much for their country during Senate consideration of the FY12 National Defense Authorization Act.

Sincerely,

The New York Civil Liberties Union  
Community Health Care Network  
Family Planning Advocates of New York State  
Health Care for All New York  
Planned Parenthood Hudson Peconic  
Planned Parenthood Mid-Hudson Valley  
Planned Parenthood of South Central New York  
Planned Parenthood Mohawk Hudson  
Planned Parenthood of Nassau County  
Planned Parenthood of New York City  
Planned Parenthood of the North Country New York  
Planned Parenthood of Western New York  
Planned Parenthood of the Southern Finger Lakes  
Planned Parenthood of the Rochester/Syracuse Region  
Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood  
NARAL Pro-Choice New York  
National Organization for Women – New York City  
New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault  
Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health  
Public Health Solutions  
Raising Women's Voices-NY  
SisterSong NYC  
Trust Black Women  
The Women's City Club of New York  
WCLA – Choice Matters  
Women's Bar Association of the State of New York  
National Organization for Women-New York State

CC: District Offices