

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 11, 2022

Mr. Michael P. Shores
Director
Office of Regulation Policy and Management
Office of General Counsel
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW, Room 1063B
Washington, DC 20420

Re: RIN 2900-AR57-Reproductive Health Services

Dear Mr. Shores,

We write to comment on the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) interim final rule (IFR) entitled Reproductive Health Services, 87 Fed Reg 55287 (September 9, 2022) that will allow VA to provide abortion counseling, and, in some cases, abortions, to pregnant veterans and Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) beneficiaries. We thank VA for taking critical action to protect the life and health of veterans by issuing this IFR and urge the Department to ensure that all veterans and CHAMPVA beneficiaries have access to abortion in the final rule. In doing so, VA would honor its promise to promote, preserve, and restore the health of patients.

Like others across the country, veterans face significant barriers to care as extremist lawmakers continue to work to decimate abortion access. Just months after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, dozens of states across the country are enforcing and/or passing total or near total abortion bans, with more expected to do so imminently. This is of grave concern as access to abortion care is essential to a woman's freedom to make decisions about her health and well-being.

Denying someone an abortion can greatly harm their health and future. Women who are denied abortions report more life-threatening complications and chronic health conditions than those who are able to access abortion care. While most women will have healthy pregnancies, some will experience illness or conditions that can cause serious problems. When abortion is difficult or impossible to access, complicated health conditions can worsen and even result in death. Being denied an abortion also has devastating effects for women's financial well-being, even pushing some families into poverty. The harms of abortion-specific restrictions are even more burdensome on women who already face barriers to accessing health care, including women with low incomes, Black, Indigenous, and people of color, immigrants, young people, people with disabilities, the LGBTQI+ community, and those living in rural and other medically underserved areas. VA has a duty to ensure access to care for those who have served, and we commend this effort to honor that promise.

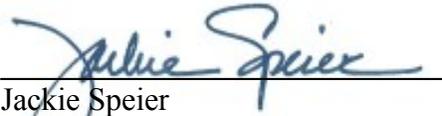
The IFR is an important first action to ensuring access to this care by providing abortion care for veterans and eligible family members in cases of rape, incest, and in cases of life or health endangerment of the pregnant person. This is especially critical for VA beneficiaries given the high rates of military sexual trauma for service members. Everyone should be able to access abortion care, no matter why they need it or where they obtain their care. There are many reasons why someone might need an abortion, and all of them are valid. We therefore urge VA to continue to work ensure that veterans can seamlessly access full coverage of abortion care, regardless of the circumstances.

We thank you for your attention to this issue, and we look forward to working together to ensure that our veterans and their families have full access to the health care that they deserve. If we can be of further assistance, please contact Acree Trivett in the Office of Representative Lois Frankel at Acree.Trivett@mail.house.gov or (202) 225-9890.

Sincerely,



Lois Frankel
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Jackie Speier
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Brenda L. Lawrence
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Sylvia Garcia
Vice Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Veronica Escobar
Vice Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Sara Jacobs
Freshman Representative
Democratic Women's Caucus



Nikema Williams
Whip
Democratic Women's Caucus



Diana DeGette
Co-Chair, Pro-Choice Caucus



Barbara Lee
Co-Chair of Pro-Choice Caucus



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



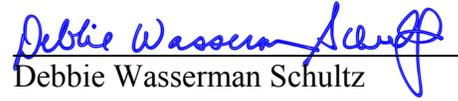
Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



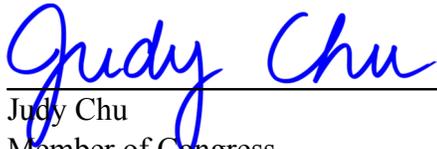
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



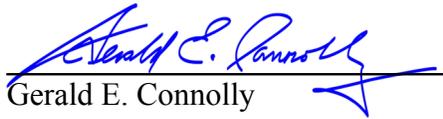
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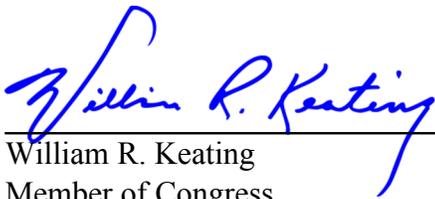
Karen Bass
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
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Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



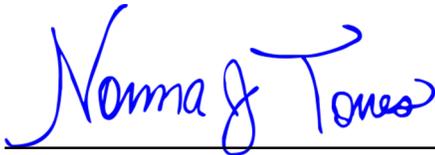
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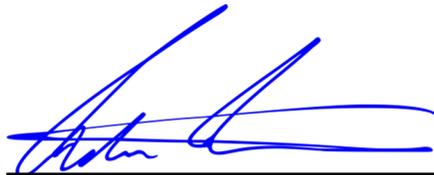
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Haley M. Stevens
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Adriano Espaillat
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Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Tammy Baldwin
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