

September 6, 2018

Dear Licenciado Thomas Rivera Schatz
Presidente, Comisión de Relaciones Federales, políticas y económicas
El Capitolio
San Juan, Puerto Rico
jmartinez@senado.pr.gov, bmcollazo@senado.pr.gov

Dear Lcdo. Thomas Rivera Schatz:

We write on behalf of Global Doctors for Choice (GDC), an international network of physicians from a range of specialties committed to improving women's reproductive health and rights. GDC is committed to the provision of high-quality medical care grounded in science and to the defense of human rights. We strive to protect and expand access to comprehensive reproductive health care through advocacy for evidence-based policy and medical research.

In support CLACAI's National Campaign for Free, Safe and Accessible Abortion in Puerto Rico, we urge you to vote against Senate Bill 950 as it will limit access to free and safe abortion in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is subject to United States law and the Roe v Wade decision established privacy and health as key components to abortion.

Senate Bill 950 aims to restrict access to safe abortion services in Puerto Rico and to confuse and intimidate women to direct their reproductive decision-making. This project contains measures that, contrary to what its title indicates, do not protect women or help to preserve life. Most of the measures are based on false statements and without scientific evidence and are loaded with moral connotations that put at risk the health and life of women.

The main problems of the Senate Bill 950 include the following:

1. The premise that abortion is dangerous for the health of women, regardless of the conditions in which it is performed and without citing scientific sources.
2. It requires a waiting period of 48 hours after receiving an orientation about an abortion procedure - which is not medically necessary – with the aim of postponing the provision of the medical service.
3. It forces physicians to provide false information about supposed risks, which are not validated by scientific evidence.
4. It requires that abortions for pregnancies of 12 weeks or more be provided in hospitals, despite that these procedures can be provided safely in specialized clinics.
5. It prohibits abortions due to conditions of genetic anomalies and imposes 15 years of imprisonment for the doctor or woman who violates this circumstance.
6. It prohibits abortion after 20 weeks.
7. It excludes all psychological or emotional conditions needs for obtaining an abortion, including medical emergencies.
8. It restricts access to abortion for patients under 21 years of age.
9. Noncompliance with the law is criminalized.

The limitations to abortion without a scientific basis are a setback to human rights and an attack on the public health of Puerto Rico. Contrary to myths, disinformation, and fundamentalist moral beliefs, abortion saves lives when practiced in adequate conditions. We know that limiting and/or prohibiting the right to access an abortion will lead to high-risk clandestine abortions that will threaten women's lives.

We support CLACAI's comprehensive proposal that includes sexual education in schools, free access to contraceptive methods to avoid unwanted pregnancies, and access to legal abortion to avoid maternal morbidity and mortality. We support and defend the right of women to their bodies as a basic and indispensable right in any democratic society.

As doctors, our duty is to our patients. Research indicates that women will have abortions whether or not they are legally accessible. This proposed bill would limit access to safe and legal abortion and thus place women's health and lives at risk. We are alarmed that the proposed Senate Bill 950 would deny women access to medical services.

As a global network of physicians, we urge you to conform to evidence-based medical standards of care by providing women with an effective means to safeguard their health and, therefore, to vote against this bill.

Sincerely,

ANA CRISTINA GONZALEZ V.

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