Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 25, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20004

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
The Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20004

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Majority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20004

The Honorable John Cornyn
Majority Whip, U.S. Senate
The Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Speaker Ryan and Majority Leader McConnell:

The recent and alarming spread of the Zika virus poses a serious threat to pregnant women and their children. We write to urge you to join us in our longstanding support of increasing access to reproductive health care, including contraceptives, for women who choose to use them, worldwide.

When contracted by pregnant women, the virus has been linked to microcephaly, a serious birth defect. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared these Zika-linked birth defects a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern." In the Americas alone, the outbreak could infect up to 4 million people, and local transmission of the virus has been reported in 26 countries and 3 U.S. territories. At least 50 travel-related Zika infections have been documented in at least 13 states and the District of Columbia, and last week, Dallas, Texas health officials

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

announced a case of the virus that had been sexually transmitted by a returning traveler, the first known case of the virus being acquired within the continental United States. Our government has a critical role to play in addressing health inequities for women in Zika-affected countries, including here at home, and in ensuring that women everywhere have agency, as well as access to critical health care services.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other health authorities have issued travel guidance to women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant to delay travel to impacted areas and, if they must travel, to take steps to prevent mosquito bites. In some impacted areas, women are being told to delay pregnancies; for example, the Minister of Health in El Salvador told women to delay pregnancy until 2018. Advising women to delay pregnancy is especially problematic since[1], as Human Rights Watch has documented, women in these regions have limited access to birth control and reproductive health care. According to multiple experts, including the CDC, the Pan American Health Organization, and the WHO[2], women in many Zika-affected countries experience high rates of sexual violence[3] and experience other barriers to accessing basic health care services. Furthermore, in the impacted 18 Latin American countries and the Caribbean[4], the contraceptive prevalence rate, which measures access to contraceptives, is very low (in the 30 percent range). In contrast, the United States' contraceptive prevalence rate is 76 percent.[5] This means that women in countries most impacted by Zika are more likely to be at risk of bearing children with Zika-linked birth defects because of where they live, and less likely to have access to contraception services. It is readily apparent that directives from health authorities regarding delaying pregnancy fail to take into account the actual ability of women in these countries to choose the timing of their pregnancies. The United States must act to provide the assistance necessary to minimize the potentially devastating effects of the virus worldwide, and this response must include family planning resources.

It is imperative that any global response to the Zika virus must include a robust and focused effort on expanding access to women's health care services. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the U.S. Agency on International Development (USAID), the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the CDC collectively work to increase access to family planning services, reduce maternal and infant mortality, prevent and treat HIV/AIDS, and provide support for communities in need of aid. These agencies and programs will play a

---

[1] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/as-zika-virus-spreads-el-salvador-asks-women-not-to-get-pregnant-until-2018/2016/01/22/1dc2dadc-c11f-11e5-98c8-7fab78677d51_story.html ; http://time.com/4197318/zika-virus-latin-america-avoid-pregnancy/ ;

[2] Pan American Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=20441&Itemid=2518; World Health Organization, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/77434/1/WHO_RHR_12.37_eng.pdf.

[3] https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/26/dispatches-zika-warnings-versus-realities-women-face

[4] Kaiser Family Foundation- Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cost Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname, and Venezuela (as of February 01, 2015) http://kff.org/global-health-policy/perspective/zika-virus-the-challenge-for-women/?utm_campaign=KFF-2016-February-Zika-Virus&utm_content=27184995&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.

[5] Kaiser Family Foundation, http://kff.org/global-indicator/contraceptive-prevalence-rate/

critical role in helping women under the duress of Zika, as they are focused on ensuring that pregnant women in many affected areas have access to comprehensive prenatal care and to contraceptive services so they may choose the timing of their pregnancies. The ability to choose the timing of a pregnancy is a critical right for women, especially at this juncture. It is imperative that we support and promote these agencies and programs as they support women both in the U.S. and across the globe during this public health crisis.

Zika's devastating and disproportionate impact on pregnant women and their infants highlights the need for reproductive health and family planning to be included in public health efforts. We urge you to recognize the true nature of this public health emergency and work with us to improve women's access to contraceptives and other basic public health needs by supporting:

- increased funding and support for UNFPA, PEPFAR, USAID, and CDC to work on maternal and child health and access to reproductive health care services, including family planning, in Zika-impacted areas; and
- increased funding for domestic women's health programs, such as the Title X clinics, CDC and the Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Program, along with other valuable programs that provide critical access to birth control, counseling and education.

Now is the time to bolster women's access to family planning services to support women in Zika-impacted countries and here in the U.S. as part of immediate preventive measures. This effort must accompany increased research to better understand the Zika virus, and develop better diagnostic tests, treatments, and vaccines to prevent future outbreaks. By taking action now, we can make significant progress toward mitigating the impact of the Zika virus abroad and preventing the spread of the virus' harm to women and their families.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress

Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress

Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

Eliot Engel
Member of Congress

Marc Veasey
Member of Congress

Ami Bera
Member of Congress

Nita M. Lowey
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Pete Aguilar
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

Robert Brady
Member of Congress

Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

Lois Capps
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

John Conyers Jr.
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress

Tammy Duckworth
Member of Congress

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

Donna F. Edwards
Member of Congress

Lois Frankel
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

Alan Grayson
Member of Congress

Elizabeth H. Esty
Member of Congress

Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Sam Farr
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress

Janice Hahn
Member of Congress

William R. Keating
Member of Congress

Rubén Hinojosa
Member of Congress

Robin Kelly
Member of Congress

Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress

Joseph P. Kennedy
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

Dan Kildee
Member of Congress

Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson
Member of Congress

Sander M. Levin
Member of Congress

John Lewis
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Ted Lieu
Member of Congress

Jim McDermott
Member of Congress

Dave Loebsack
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Doris O. Matsui
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

Stacey Plaskett
Member of Congress

Patrick E. Murphy
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Charles B. Rangel
Member of Congress

Donald Norcross
Member of Congress

Kathleen M. Rice
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Cedric L. Richmond
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Tim Ryan
Member of Congress

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress

Dina Titus
Member of Congress

Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

Adam Schiff
Member of Congress

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Filemon Vela
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress

Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

John A. Yarmuth
Member of Congress