

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 14, 2018

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We write to express our grave concerns regarding reports that the Department of State is considering barring United States diplomats from using the terms “sexual and reproductive health” and “comprehensive sexuality education,” while also adopting new and regressive positions concerning the health and wellbeing of women and families.

We strongly object to such censorship and, if these reports are true, urge you to reject such proposals.

To suppress such language is to signal to the world that the U.S. deems ideology more important than facts in determining America’s foreign policy priorities. That is particularly alarming with respect to global health, as U.S. leadership and global health assistance have helped save millions of lives and protect Americans from infectious threats.

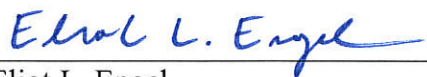
Failure to promote evidence-based programming and policies in unambiguous language will threaten the progress that has been made. A prohibition of the phrase “sexual and reproductive health,” for example, would add significantly to the obstacles that many already face in accessing essential health services, including contraception and testing and treatment for HIV. It would further isolate the U.S. from other donor governments and hinder our ability to leverage investments from others to extend the reach and impact of our global health programs. Such a step would also jeopardize the efficient and effective use of American taxpayer dollars and, most importantly, the health and wellbeing of those served by U.S. foreign assistance – especially women and girls.

Prohibiting the terms “sexual and reproductive health” and “comprehensive sexuality education” would also contradict well-established science and standards of medical care. “Sexual and reproductive health” is clearly defined by the World Health Organization, which has long set standards of care for providers worldwide with the input of United Nations member states. Similarly, the 2016 *Lancet* Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing referred to

comprehensive sexuality education as “essential knowledge for health,”¹ while the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists’ Committee on Adolescent Health Care found that “[studies] have demonstrated that comprehensive sexuality education programs reduce the rates of sexual activity, sexual risk behaviors...sexually transmitted infections, and adolescent pregnancy.”² To reject these findings is to reject the expertise and consensus of respected health care authorities.

We urge you to reject any policy that censors American diplomats, undermines global health, and threatens the tremendous progress that has been shepherded by U.S. global health assistance. We look forward to your response.

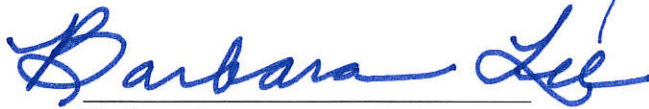
Sincerely,



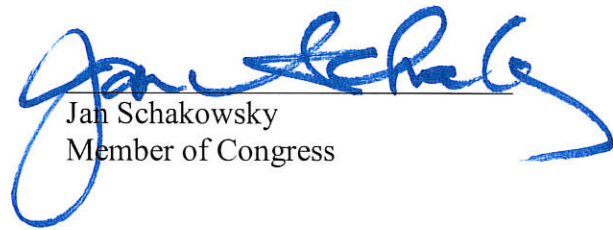
Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress



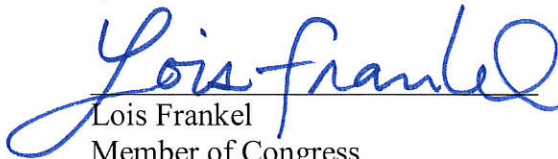
Nita M. Lowey
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress

¹ Patton GC, Sawyer SM, Santelli JS, et al. Our future: a Lancet commission on adolescent health and wellbeing. *Lancet*. 2016; 387 (10036): 2423-78. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5832967/>.

² Comprehensive sexuality education. Committee Opinion No. 678. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. *Obstet Gynecol* 2016; 128:e227-30. <https://www.acog.org/-/media/Committee-Opinions/Committee-on-Adolescent-Health-Care/co678.pdf?dmc=1&ts=20181107T1659434767>.