



April 6, 2009

Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Public Health and Science
Attention: Rescission Proposal Comments
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW., Room 716G
Washington, DC 20201

Docket ID: RIN 0991-AB49

On behalf of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, I write to express support for the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) proposed rule to rescind the rule entitled "Ensuring That Department of Health and Human Services Funds Do Not Support Coercive or Discriminatory Policies or Practices in Violation of Federal Law." In its current form, the regulation could have an adverse effect on access to contraceptive services, which could exacerbate the nation's high rates of both teen pregnancy and unintended pregnancy.

The National Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy for reaching this goal is to prevent both teen pregnancy and unintended pregnancy, especially among single young adults.

During the public comment period on the original proposed rule last fall, the National Campaign, along with thousands of others, expressed great concerns about the need for the Department to clarify that "abortion" as defined in the proposal did not encompass contraceptive services and the full range of Food and Drug Administration-approved contraceptive methods, including emergency contraception. In issuing its final rule, the Department declined to do so, acknowledging that questions of this nature are "highly controversial and strongly debated" and that confusion persists among health care workers and the broader public on this topic. We believe the Department's failure to clarify this point in the final rule could greatly affect how it is interpreted in federally-funded entities across the country and jeopardize women and couples' access to services and methods that prevent unintended pregnancy. This could be particularly problematic in rural and underserved areas, where providers are few and the ability of an individual to find a health care professional who is willing to provide these services is limited.

Contraceptive services play a critical role in preventing teen and unintended pregnancy. Our views are consistent with those of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which recently referred to modern contraception as one of the ten greatest public health achievements of the 20th century. In 2006 alone, the contraceptive services provided at publicly funded clinics helped women prevent 1.94 million unintended pregnancies, which would likely have resulted in about 860,000 unintended births and 810,000 abortions. Currently, 62 million women in the United States are in their childbearing years, and more than half (62 percent) are using some form of contraception to prevent pregnancy. In fact, 98 percent of sexually experienced women have used at least one contraceptive method. Even so, it is still the case that half of the 6.4 million pregnancies in this country are unintended—more than 3 million annually—which underscores the need to support access to and the effective use of contraception.

Reducing teen and unintended pregnancy is a powerful way to make progress on other critical issues facing the nation. Lower rates of both teen and unintended pregnancy lead to less poverty, more opportunities for young men and women to complete their education or achieve other life goals, a reduced burden on taxpayers, and fewer situations in which men and women make the difficult decision to seek abortion. For example, the 22 percent decrease in the abortion rate between 1987 and 2001 was largely driven by the decline in teen pregnancy.

Given the key role contraception plays in preventing both teen and unintended pregnancy, the National Campaign strongly believes that it is important that federal policies not impede access to and use of contraception. We respectfully request that DHHS rescind the rule as a necessary step to support both responsible behavior on the parts of individuals and responsible policies in the public and private sectors.

Thank you for the consideration of this request. Should you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Andrea Kane, the National Campaign's Senior Director of Policy and Partnerships at (202) 478-8554 or at akane@thenc.org.

Sincerely,

Sarah S. Brown