

EQUITY

FORWARD

MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties
From: Equity Forward
Date: March 1, 2018
Re: HHS is Fundamentally Reshaping Title X

Recently, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [released](#) woefully late guidelines for the Title X national family planning program. The guidelines failed to include a [single mention](#) of the word “contraceptives” and instead pivoted to right-wing priorities like abstinence education and “fertility awareness.”

The far rightward shift of the program’s guidelines is reflective of the HHS political appointees’ backgrounds who have been tasked with running Title X. If past is prologue and - as [President Reagan’s](#) oft [repeated](#) adage says - if personnel is policy, it is clear where the Title X program is headed. Anti-reproductive health ideologues are running a program that has long been based on scientific and medical evidence. They are shifting Title X to reflect a far more conservative, limited view of reproductive health.

Why Title X Matters

The primary purpose of Title X for the past 40 years has been to provide low- or no-cost birth control to low-income people across the U.S. This has been true throughout Republican and Democratic administrations since Nixon first [signed](#) the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act of 1970.

As a result of our national commitment to ensuring widespread availability of high-quality family planning, made possible in large part by Title X, [the teen birth rate has dropped to an all-time low](#) and [the abortion rate has also reached a historic low](#). While the federal government invests roughly \$300 million in Title X annually, a recent study by the [Guttmacher Institute](#) found that the program can be credited with saving state and federal governments roughly \$7 billion a year.

Today we are seeing the Trump Administration fundamentally reimagine the program to be one that - rather than supporting birth control access and reproductive freedom - prioritizes *fertility* and an antiquated view of the family.

Title X has a [legacy](#) of providing “a broad range of FDA-approved contraceptive methods.” Despite that, HHS has [removed references](#) to contraception altogether from the grant guidelines. And as reported by the [Wall Street Journal](#), “For the first time, it sets up a point system that favors certain characteristics, giving preference, for example, to faith-based clinics and clinics that counsel abstinence for teenagers.”

This is a critical issue of economic and social importance to more than [4 million people](#) across the country who rely on Title X to help them decide if and when to have children. It is apparent that Title X’s long history of bipartisan, evidence-based work is in jeopardy with Valerie Huber, Cathy Deeds, and others at the helm.

Legislators on Capitol Hill should watch closely as this season of grant applications and awards plays out.

Trump Administration HHS Appointees: Title X Chain of Command

Valerie Huber, Chief of Staff, Assistant Secretary for Health; Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Population Affairs

- Prior to her appointment, Huber spent nearly 20 years as a conservative activist promoting abstinence-only, anti-contraception programs.
- Huber has made numerous public statements [doubting the efficacy](#) of condoms and other contraceptives and advocating against expanding birth control access.
 - Huber authored a report in 2016 claiming that teens who received comprehensive sex education (versus abstinence education) were "much more likely to have sex when they learn about LARC."
 - In response to a 2016 study by the Guttmacher Institute and Columbia University crediting increased contraception use with fewer U.S. teen pregnancies, Huber claimed the study was biased toward birth control. "As public health experts and policymakers, we must normalize sexual delay more than we normalize teen sex, even with contraception," Huber said in a statement published by NPR.
- Huber is on the [Advisory Board](#) of the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, an organization whose [goals](#) include "increasing the age of sexual debut" and "decreasing the number of sexual partners."
- In her [2009 master's thesis](#) on sex education in public schools, Huber wrote that Christians "should promote Biblical standards" in sex education. The thesis goes on to mention abstinence 213 times while mentioning contraception only 21 times.

- From 2010-2015, Huber served on the board of directors for Pregnancy Decision Health Centers, a Columbus, Ohio-based [anti-abortion](#) counseling center that does not offer or refer for birth control.
- [[Valerie Huber Master's Thesis, 2009](#); [Washington Post, 3/27/10](#); [U.S. News & World Report, 10/12/12](#); [U.S. News & World Report, 4/7/15](#); [NPR, 3/9/2015](#); [Teens Speak Out report, 6/16](#); [NPR, 8/31/16](#); [Pregnancy Decision Health Centers 2015 Form 990](#)]

Steven Valentine, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health

- Valentine [previously worked](#) as interim legislative director for Susan B. Anthony List, a far right organization that has [advocated](#) for radical changes to Title X that would decrease access to birth control for millions.
- [[Steven Valentine LinkedIn, accessed 2/27/18](#)]

Cathy Deeds, Senior Advisory for Special Initiatives, Office of Population Affairs

- Since the late 1980's, Deeds has worked in the anti-reproductive health movement, including for controversial, anti-LGBT and anti-reproductive health leaders and organizations.
 - In 1987, Deeds worked for the Free Congress foundation, an organization focused on "the Culture War." While at Free Congress, Deeds declared her opposition to abortion as government-sanctioned murder.
 - In the mid-1990's, Deeds held a government relations and lobbying role with the right-wing group Family Research Council, an organization known for its extreme anti-reproductive health and anti-LGBT stances.
 - From 2004 – 2006, Deeds worked at Office of Special Counsel during a period of "anti-gay animus" and religious discrimination.
- Deeds herself has expressed complete opposition to abortion and believes contraception does not reduce unintended pregnancy.
- Deeds has also long been connected to Susan B. Anthony List, Students for Life America, and various Catholic organizations including the Minnesota Catholic Conference.
- [[Studies In Political Economy, Summer 1991](#); [Welfare Academy, 10/29/87](#); [National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United State Catholic Conference, 3/3/00](#); [National Catholic Register, 11/22/98](#); [Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, 10/12/12](#); [Government Publishing Office Lobby List, 6/6/95](#); [Daily Beast, 10/2/14](#); [Office of Special Counsel, 12/18/13](#); [Project on Government Oversight, 12/18/13](#); [Cathy Deeds LinkedIn, accessed 1/18/18](#); [Church of St. Frances Cabrini Pastor's Comments 2012, accessed 1/18/18](#); [Pro-Life Future, accessed 1/18/18](#)]

Mary Vigil, Senior Advisor, Office of Population Affairs

- In March 2012, the Washington Post characterized Vigil as “a D.C. nurse angry that the Obama administration last year rescinded a Bush-era regulation that expanded the rights of health-care workers to refuse to provide care they oppose on moral or religious grounds.” Vigil told the newspaper, “‘There are so many places I’d like to look for work where I wouldn’t be allowed to practice’.”
- In June 2017, Vigil attended a week-long “pro-life boot camp” at the Center for Ethics and Culture’s annual Notre Dame Vita Institute at the University of Notre Dame.
- Her health care experience is almost entirely with organizations that oppose abortion and the common use of birth control. Starting in at least September 2012, Vigil served in several health care-related roles for the Archdiocese of Washington and Catholic Charities in Washington, DC, including as Director of Medical Services for Catholic Charities.
- [[*Washington Post*, 3/23/12](#); [*Notre Dame Center for Ethics and Cultures*, 6/20/17](#); [*American Public Health Association*, accessed 12/20/17](#); [*The Catholic Standard*, 9/25/12](#); [*The Catholic Standard*, 4/9/13](#); [*Ethics and Public Policy Center*, 10/1/15](#)]