

Don't take away my health care

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As we begin the new year, some politicians are itching to restrict access to our reproductive health care. Members of Congress have pledged to introduce legislation defunding Planned Parenthood and basic health care as their top priority. Let's be clear: Attacking Planned Parenthood will have a devastating effect in Oregon, especially among people of color who already face unequal access to care.

Planned Parenthood services are essential. These health centers serve 2.5 million people each year, including more than 60,000 in Oregon. The bulk of what they do is actually preventive health care, such as cancer screenings, birth control, STD testing and treatment, and well-woman exams. One in five women — like my nieces, daughter and me — will get care at Planned Parenthood in her lifetime. And many would not have any other place to turn to if Planned Parenthood wasn't there.

I have volunteered and supported Planned Parenthood for more than 30 years. I still recall going to my volunteer interview along with my 2-week-old daughter in her red Christmas outfit. I have supported Planned Parenthood health centers because I care about the people they serve: those most in need of services. I appreciate that they care about providing great care to all. As a nurse, that's important. So, I have referred many people to Planned Parenthood through the years. I trust Planned Parenthood to help them make decisions and provide care without judging.

Legislation that defunds Planned Parenthood — one of the most common attacks — is particularly cruel. It targets people who rely on federal programs such as Medicaid or Title X — those who are already struggling to get by — and tells them they can no longer turn to Planned Parenthood for health care. For many of them, Planned Parenthood is the only healthcare provider they can, or want to, turn to.

Planned Parenthood's mission is to ensure people have access to reproductive health care no matter what; therefore, more than half of its centers are in rural or medically underserved communities. Many patients who rely on safety net programs for health care already have a difficult time getting gynecological care, including the most effective types of birth control. In fact, in 68 percent of the counties where Planned Parenthood operates, they serve at least half of the patients who rely on federal funds for health care. In 21 percent of the counties, Planned Parenthood is the only safety net family planning provider. Because of that, the people who would be hurt the most are those who already face barriers to accessing reproductive health care — affecting people of color, people with low incomes and people who live in rural areas the hardest of all.

While it's clear right-wing politicians would like nothing more than to shut down Planned Parenthood health centers and end access to reproductive health care across this country, that isn't what people in Oregon want. It's not what I want. It's not what people across the country voted for.

Women don't go to Planned Parenthood to make a political statement; they go because they need health care. As 15 national polls have shown, voters overwhelmingly oppose attacks on Planned Parenthood. And polling shows that half of Donald Trump's own supporters oppose defunding. There's a reason Planned Parenthood already has seen an outpouring of support since the election — and why so many people in Oregon are already getting organized to protect access to care at Planned Parenthood.

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon's Leadership & Advocacy Teams — which are active in eight counties across the state — are planning how we're going to fight back. We plan on making sure every single politician in Salem knows that we will not stand for these attacks.

To be sure, some politicians are so hell-bent on attacking reproductive health care that they don't care who they hurt in the process. If they strip millions of people of their basic health and rights, it would send the country into chaos, and that's not going to happen on my watch. Those extremists neither speak for me nor the majority of Americans. Together our voices are more than loud enough to drown them out.

So I invite everyone in Oregon to join me and Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon. We're getting organized. We will not back down, we will not be silenced, and we will fight like hell to ensure that they do not take away our health care.

