

OPINION

Family Planning is Essential to American Life

Women's healthcare is under threat

BY CLARE COLEMAN

If you're an average woman, you want two children, according to various surveys. That means you'll spend about five years of your life trying to become pregnant, being pregnant or recovering from pregnancy, and 30 years trying to avoid it.

You can do that thanks to the June 1965 landmark Supreme Court decision *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which affirmed the right of married couples to use contraceptives -- and more importantly, recognized an individual's right to privacy in family planning matters. Universal usage and acceptance of contraceptives followed, transforming the lives of millions of Americans.

The *Griswold* case was a catalyst for our national family planning program -- Title X of the Public Health Service Act -- the only dedicated source of federal funding for family planning services. Created in 1970, Title X provides access to family planning for all, without regard to economic circumstances.

Today, contraceptives are an important part of family life in America -- so much so that 98 percent of us have used birth control at some point in our lives, and we mostly take it for granted.

We shouldn't. During the recent battle in Congress over funding the government, the House of Representatives voted to eliminate Title X. Opponents of family planning used a mixture of misinfor-

Title X funds 4,500 nonprofit and government-run sites nationwide: most are county and local health departments. The rest are hospitals, family planning councils and other private nonprofit agencies. These agencies are required to provide preventive and primary health care services including pelvic exams and Pap tests; pregnancy testing; screening for high blood pressure, anemia, diabetes and cervical and breast cancer, and for sexually transmitted infections includ-

973,000 unintended pregnancies that would likely have resulted in 432,600 births and 406,200 abortions. The centers also performed 2.2 million Pap tests, 5.9 million STI tests and a million confidential HIV tests in 2009 alone.

Seventeen million people need some assistance in order to get this important care, but today, Title X is funded to cover just over five million of those in need. There are always more patients than subsidies. Seventy percent of the individuals seen at Title X-funded health centers have incomes at or below the federal poverty level -- meaning they earn less than \$10,830 per year. Many of them are working young adults, living paycheck to paycheck. They count down the days until they get paid and are just one unexpected problem from disaster -- if the car engine light comes on; the childcare center raises its fees; or their hours are cut.

Six in ten women who get care from Title X consider it their usual source of health care, and for many it is their only source. Patients under the federal poverty level receive services at no cost to them; those

who make over \$10,830 a year are provided services on a sliding fee scale according to income.

Although no patient is turned away because of an inability to pay, Title X actually saves money for the government. Every dollar invested in publicly funded family planning averts nearly \$4 in Medicaid costs. Given its proven effectiveness, it only makes sense that the Obama administration should include contraceptives in the women's health preventive services benefit under the Affordable Care Act.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has cited family planning as one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century, and Title X funding is essential to our effort to prevent unintended pregnancies and improve public health while saving taxpayers billions of dollars a year.

As the states struggle with growing budget shortfalls, continued funding for Title X should be recognized for what it is: an essential part of America's health care system.

Coleman is president and CEO of the National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association.



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mation and innuendo to entangle family planning in their anti-abortion war, ignoring the fact that Title X saves the government some \$3.4 billion every year by preventing unintended pregnancies, nearly half of which would likely have ended in abortion.

The Senate saved the program, but another attempt to kill Title X is certain this year. When it comes, Americans must recognize that access to basic primary and preventive care is being threatened.

ing HIV; basic infertility services; health education; and referrals for other health and social services -- as well as contraceptives and counseling about them.

These are the facts of life: According to new Guttmacher Institute research, unintended pregnancy costs U.S. taxpayers approximately \$11 billion a year. Without publicly funded family planning services, these costs would be 60 percent higher. In 2008, services at Title X centers helped prevent

End Discrimination on Ex-Offenders

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

When pundits discuss America's still too high unemployment rate, they usually tell stories of individuals with impressive work histories and college degrees who are having a

hard time finding a job after being downsized. Or, they relate tales of former manufacturing employees lost in our new, more tech driven economy.

Rarely does anyone share the plight of the more than 65 million Americans with some sort of criminal past who have a hard time finding work.

We need to talk about this population more often and come up with solutions to help them secure employment.

The reality is that more and more people with criminal histories are trying to enter the work force but failed background checks keep thousands of people from getting hired, some for offenses that are decades old and as minor as disorderly conduct,



drinking and having too much fun in the street with friends. Some of those being denied work have never been convicted of a crime, only arrested.

Every year, more than 700,000 people are released from state and federal prisons: they all need to find work so that they may support themselves and their families, contribute to their communities and to ensure poverty, frustration and desperation don't force them to return to a life of crime.

There are no federal laws that protect individuals with a criminal past from being discriminated against by employers.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, however, does suggest that employers take in account the severity of the offense, the amount of time that has passed since the crime was committed and how the crime relates to the position being applied for.

We need more than EEOC guidelines. There has to be a con-

scious effort by the business community to weed out practices that discriminate against ex-offenders. Most accept that some with a criminal past will not be able to work in certain sectors; for example, a child predator cannot work with children.

But there are countless other positions this individual can hold that won't present a danger to society. Employers also need to understand that, just because someone committed a crime once does not mean they'll do it again. In fact, research shows that the farther back the crime occurred, the less likely the offender will be to repeat that mistake.

Current hiring practices are locking millions out of the work force. This discrimination not only hurts the individuals in question, it damages America's long-term economic health. We're losing millions of workers need to help keep our country moving forward.

Greg Mathis is a former Michigan District Court judge and current syndicated television show judge.

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