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Tuesday, December 13, 2011

PLAN B: Senators Call on Sec. Sebelius to Explain the Science Behind Plan B Decision

Senator Murray leads letter calling on HHS Secretary to provide the “specific rationale” and “scientific data” for overruling FDA on emergency contraception access

(Washington, D.C.) – Today, 14 U.S. Senators, led by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), called on Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to provide the scientific basis behind her decision to limit the availability Plan B emergency contraception. Last Wednesday, Secretary Sebelius overruled the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) by refusing to allow emergency contraceptives to be sold over the counter, despite the FDA’s recommendation to do so.

“We feel strongly that FDA regulations should be based on science,” the Senators wrote today. “We ask that you share with us your specific rationale and the scientific data you relied on for the decision to overrule the FDA recommendation. On behalf of the millions of women we represent, we want to be assured that this and future decisions affecting women’s health will be based on medical and scientific evidence.”

The letter was sent from Senators Patty Murray (D-WA), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Daniel Akaka (D-HI), Carl Levin (D-MI), John Kerry (D-MA), Tom Harkin (D-IA), Al Franken (D-MN), Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), and Jeff Merkley (D-OR).

The full text of the letter follows:

December 13, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
US Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

We are writing to express our disappointment with your December 7, 2011 decision to block the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) recommendation to make Plan B One-Step available over-the-counter. We feel strongly that FDA regulations should be based on science. We write to you today to ask that you provide us with the rationale for this decision.

As numerous medical societies and patient advocates have argued, improved access to birth control, including emergency contraception, has been proven to reduce unintended pregnancies. Nearly half of all pregnancies that occur in the United States each year are unintended. Keeping Plan B behind the counter makes it harder for all women to obtain a safe and effective product they may need to prevent an unintended pregnancy.

We ask that you share with us your specific rationale and the scientific data you relied on for the decision to overrule the FDA recommendation. On behalf of the millions of women we represent, we want to be assured that this and future decisions affecting women's health will be based on medical and scientific evidence.

Sincerely,

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Daniel Akaka
United States Senator

Carl Levin
United States Senator

John Kerry
United States Senator

Tom Harkin
United States Senator

Al Franken
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Frank Lautenberg
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Bernie Sanders
United States Senator

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Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Jeff Merkley
United States Senator

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