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USA

# Policing women's bodies

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**Since the beginning of February Live Action has released several videos shot at different Planned Parenthood clinics. The sting operation seems designed to reveal that the organization is not complying with federal legislation. They claim to show Planned Parenthood staff offering advice to those in sex trafficking of teenagers. Planned Parenthood responded by announcing it is retraining staff, but it also claims the videos have been doctored.**

Meanwhile U.S. Rep Mike Pence (R-IN), proposed denying Title X funding to any organization that provides abortions. Pence's target is clearly Planned Parenthood, whose network of clinics offers a variety of health services and remains the country's largest abortion provider.

Title X was enacted in 1970 to provide sex education and contraceptive services for low-income women. Funding covers pelvic and breast examinations as well as testing for high blood pressure, anemia and diabetes, but specifically excludes abortions. Currently the program costs \$318 million and serves five million women. In 2009 Planned Parenthood received \$16.9 million Title X funding.

Another federal bill, introduced by Christopher Smith (R-NJ), is designed to bar the use of subsidies to underwrite health insurance covering abortion. For example, tax credits that encourage small businesses to cover their workers' health insurance would bar abortion. It would also restrict people who buy their own insurance from claiming a reduction if the policy covered abortion, nor could they deduct expenses for the cost of the procedure itself. The bill would allow federal financing for abortion in the case of forcible rape, but would not cover statutory or coerced rape. It would allow the use of federal money where a woman might die if her pregnancy continued, but would not cover other serious health problems.

At the state level anti-abortionists are continuing to chip away at a woman's access to abortion. Five states prohibit abortion coverage in the health insurance plans to be offered by the new state exchanges, which are to go into effect in 2014. Thirty-six have active legislation requiring either parental consent or notification before a minor can obtain an abortion. Eighteen others have enacted burdensome counseling requirements. Five include materials claiming a link between abortion and breast cancer, which researchers have discredited. Ten require making ultrasound images available to women during counseling. Arizona, which requires two counseling visits to the clinic before the abortion, instructs physicians to tell patients that state funding is available if the woman continues her pregnancy-although no such funding exists!

Last year Nebraska banned abortions after 20 weeks and did not make any exception for the discovery of severe fetal anomalies. In Montana legislators are currently proposing a state constitutional amendment that declares life begins when the egg is fertilized. Although this failed twice before, chances of passage this time seem higher.

Of course the fact that 87% of all the counties in the United States have no abortion provider is one of the biggest factors limiting access. Nonetheless one-third of all U.S. women have an abortion before the age of 45 and 90% of all procedures occur within the first trimester.

Nonetheless the right wing continues to patrol women's bodies. Last year they introduced 600 bills into the state legislature, securing passage of 34. This year they will be busier, and they expect more wins. While they attempt to outlaw abortion, stamp out information about contraception, and paint providers as evil, their new motivation is based on the necessity of an austerity budget.

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