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Contact: Nikki Metzgar

(202) 599-7642 / nmetzgar@napawf.org



8 New Senate Cosponsors As the HEAL Act for Immigrant Women and Families Gains Momentum

Bill Would Open Health Care Access for Immigrant Women Now Being Denied COVID-19-Related Care

Washington, D.C. -- U.S. Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Ed Markey (D-MA), Patty Murray (D-WA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) have cosponsored the Health Equity and Access under the Law (HEAL) for Immigrant Women and Families Act, demonstrating the growing support for this proactive legislation that would remove barriers to health care for immigrants. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced the bill for the first time in the Senate on May 20 with support from more than 250 organizations.

The HEAL Act would open access to care by removing the five-year bar that immigrants face before becoming eligible for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). It would enable undocumented immigrants to purchase health insurance plans from the online Marketplace made available by the Affordable Care Act and restore Medicaid eligibility for COFA citizens.

This bill comes at a time when it is abundantly clear that health coverage and care are critical for every person, family, and community. Infectious disease outbreaks have a long history of affecting society's most vulnerable. Immigrants who don't have access to health insurance, nutritious food or safe, affordable housing fall squarely into that category.

Insured rates are considerably lower among noncitizens, including both documented and undocumented immigrants. Barriers to health coverage disproportionately harm immigrant women, who are the majority of immigrants and particularly likely to have low incomes and be young and uninsured. According to the Guttmacher Institute, nearly half of noncitizen immigrant women of reproductive age who would otherwise qualify for Medicaid are uninsured.

"The coronavirus pandemic has reinforced the need for health care equity and access for all, regardless of immigration status, gender, or race," said **U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand**. "This virus does not discriminate and it has made providing affordable, accessible health care even more urgent as it has put some of our country's most underserved communities on the front lines of this public health emergency. The HEAL Act will allow immigrant women and their families receive essential health care and help build healthier communities. Everyone has a right to health care and I will always fight to ensure access to care and resources without fear of discrimination or retribution."

"Communities of color and immigrant communities are being infected by and dying from COVID-19 at astounding rates, and it is in large part due to lack of access to health care," said **U.S. Senator Kamala Harris**. "That is why I am proud to support the HEAL Act, which will ensure every person has access to the testing, treatment, and care they need- regardless of immigration status. No person should be without access to health care, especially during a public health crisis."

“COVID-19 has shined a punishing light on the unjust health care inequities that exist for communities of color broadly, and immigrant communities in particular,” said **U.S. Senator Cory Booker**. “While we should always be working to expand access to health care for everyone, the dire current situation highlights the urgency of addressing these gaps in health care coverage. Health care is a right, and it shouldn’t depend on immigration status. We’re never going to be able to slow and stop the spread of the virus if we continue to deny entire communities access to testing, treatment, or care. I’m pleased to have my colleagues join me in addressing these health care coverage gaps that exist for immigrant families.”

“If it isn’t affordable, then health care just isn’t accessible. For years, policy decisions about our health have forced immigrant women to fend for ourselves,” said **Sung Yeon Choimorrow, executive director of the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum**. “Now, more than ever, it’s clear that every person should be able to get health care no matter how long we have been in the U.S. or the status we have been granted. Asian American and Pacific Islander women have been leading the charge for this groundbreaking legislation because our lived experiences show that access to the health care that is central to our agency and our lives, and the growing momentum to make this bill a reality demonstrates that more people than ever know this to be true as well.

“Everyone needs access to the full range of reproductive health care to live with dignity and thrive. The current pandemic has placed a spotlight on the inequities in healthcare access that many Latinas/xs, people of color, people with low incomes and im/migrants face,” said **Ann Marie Benitez, senior director of government relations at National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice**. “At the Latina Institute, we are proud to have been in the forefront among the leaders driving the push for the HEAL for Immigrant Women and Families Act, and we applaud Sen. Cory Booker for introducing this bold legislation that would extend healthcare coverage to all im/migrant families, regardless of their documentation status or how long they have been living in the U.S. Healthcare is a human right, and the HEAL for Immigrant Women and Families Act is a step forward in expanding healthcare coverage.”

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The National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF) is the only multi-issue, progressive, community organizing and policy advocacy organization for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women and girls in the U.S. NAPAWF’s mission is to build collective power so that all AAPI women and girls can have full agency over our lives, our families, and our communities.

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice (the Latina Institute) is the only national reproductive justice organization dedicated to building Latina/x power to advance health, dignity, and justice for 29 million Latinas/xs, their families, and communities in the United States through leadership development, community mobilization, policy advocacy, and strategic communications.

