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Senator Vinehout Turns Her Back on Wisconsin Women

Her Amendments Gut Birth Control Protection Act and Legalize Sex Discrimination

Madison, WI- Senator Kathleen Vinehout (D-Alma) offered amendments to the **Birth Control Protection Act** (Senate Bill 232) in the Senate Health Committee yesterday that gut the bill and leave Wisconsin women in danger of having pharmacists and pharmacies refuse to fill their legal, safe birth control prescriptions. The **Birth Control Protection Act** (BCPA) is sponsored by Senator Judy Robson (D-Beloit) and Representative Chris Sinicki (D-Milwaukee) in response to public incidents where pharmacists refused to fill a woman's birth control prescription because of a personal opposition to birth control. The BCPA guaranteed that women are never refused their safe, legal birth control prescriptions at the pharmacy counter and that the definition of abortion in Wisconsin law never be construed to include birth control.

During the executive session on SB 232 Tuesday, Vinehout sponsored two amendments: The first amendment eliminated the clarification in the bill that birth control should not be included in the definition of abortion in Wisconsin statutes. Even the legislative counsel indicated that the clarification would clear up possible confusion as to the definition of abortion in current law. During the discussion of this amendment, Vinehout commented that whether or not birth control pills cause an abortion depends on what kind of birth control is being discussed. This view supports the false notion that some birth control methods could cause an abortion. The amendment passed the committee 4 to 3, with Republican committee members Carol Roessler, Mary Lazich and Ted Kanavas voting with Vinehout

"It's a sad day when legislators like Senator Vinehout perpetuate myths about birth control that only serve to block a woman's access to birth control," stated Chris Taylor, Public Policy Director for Planned Parenthood Advocates of Wisconsin. "It's entirely inexplicable why some legislators refuse to acknowledge the scientific fact, undisputed in the legitimate medical community, that birth control pills do not cause an abortion. These legislators then pass bills limiting access to birth control based upon this complete fallacy."

Vinehout's second amendment allows pharmacists and pharmacies to refuse to dispense birth control prescriptions for "moral or religious" reasons. Though the amendment states that the pharmacist must ensure that the patient will have access to the contraceptive "elsewhere," it fails to define the scope of responsibility owed to the patient and the specific actions the pharmacist must take. Vinehout's amendment passed the committee in a 4-3 vote, with all the remaining Democrats voting against and the Republicans voting with Vinehout.

"We are very disheartened that a person who has advocated for greater access to health care doesn't extend that principal to women who need access to birth control. Her amendment legalizes sex discrimination against women by allowing pharmacists and pharmacies to deny women access to safe, legal birth control because of a personal opposition to birth control," said Taylor. "Her amendment particularly affects rural and low-income women who may not have the resources to go "elsewhere" as specified in the amendment. For some women, "elsewhere" is walking across the street. For others it is an hour long commute in a snow storm. Wisconsin women deserve better than this."

Vinehout's amendment is contrary to representations she has previously made to women's health advocates, including Planned Parenthood, about supporting access to birth control and opposing pharmacist refusal bills. It is also contrary to the public's strong support of requiring pharmacists to dispense safe, legal birth control. In a June 2007 Mark Mellman poll, 84 percent of the 600 Wisconsin voters surveyed indicated they supported legislation requiring pharmacists to dispense safe, legal birth control prescriptions. This support grows more intense in more rural communities, such as around Wausau, La Crosse and Green Bay.

The Pharmacy Examining Board, the Medical Examining Board, The Public Health Association and the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards all support SB 232 as originally drafted.

"We are confident that legislators who support the original Birth Control Protection Act will continue their fight to ensure that no woman is denied her birth control prescription at the pharmacy counter," said Taylor.

Four other states have passed laws requiring pharmacists to dispense safe, legal birth control prescriptions and three additional states have passed laws requiring a pharmacy to ensure that all birth control prescriptions are dispensed. Over 95 percent of women use birth control during their childbearing years.

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