

Planned Parenthood of Northern N.E. continues to provide health care after federal cuts

By BECCA AMEN



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After the Trump administration enacted updates last August to Title X funding stipulations in a move to severely limit access to abortion care, Vermont refused to yield. The Vt. Department of Health Services and the Planned Parenthood of Northern New England (PPNNE) made the choice to forgo federal money, instead continuing to providing abortion services to Vermonters through state funding. The choice was made possible by Vt. Health Commissioner Mark Levine, who [announced](#) that state contingency funds would be allocated to cover the \$759,000 difference. This decision came before PPNNE even announced that it as withdrawing from Title X funding.

Title X, which has been in place since 1970, has subsidized birth control and other forms of affordable reproductive healthcare on a federal level. However, these new regulations prevent the allocation of federal funding to organizations that provide or refer patients for abortion services except in certain circumstances, including medical emergency and rape.

Before these changes went into effect, PPNNE was the only provider in Vermont to receive Title X funding for family planning and reproductive health services. Title X money has never directly funded abortion services in Vermont; rather, it has helped patients, many of whom are low-income and uninsured, access cancer screenings, contraceptives and STD testing and treatments. This funding has helped approximately 11,000 Vermonters in the past year, according to Sullivan.

The update to Title X requires that healthcare providers receiving funding from Title X withhold information on abortion services from patients. Eileen Sullivan, communications director at PPNNE, indicated that this is in “clear violation” of medical ethics and standards of care.

“PPNNE’s healthcare providers are not going to conceal any information from our patients in exchange for federal funding, and we particularly refuse to let the Trump administration bully us into withholding information about safe, legal abortion,” Sullivan said.

Ruhamah Weil ’21, who worked at Middlebury Planned Parenthood as an intern last summer, recalled when the Trump administration began to restrict allocation of Title X grants.

“Middlebury’s clinic doesn’t even perform abortions due to staff, funding and space constraints, and it had lost money from the government for providing all sorts of other medical procedures,” Weil said. “This type of policy helps create and embolden the stigma around abortions. It sends a message that says that if the conversation between you and your doctor even includes the word abortion, it’s not a medical conversation.”

Weil also said she alerted patients to losses in federal funding by putting up signs around the clinic. These signs explained that federal funding would not pay for new patients’ healthcare, while making clear that financial assistance would still be provided to those who would have originally benefited from federal aid. Weil found it important that the Middlebury clinic did not give in to Title X’s new stipulations, but expressed concern that reproductive services may be now limited in other regions.

“[These changes] pile on so much more fear, hatred, and misunderstanding to the idea of abortions. It brushes the issue into a corner and tries to hide from it,” Weil said. “Instead, we proudly stood by Planned Parenthood’s commitment to providing safe and legal abortions for those who wish to receive them, but we also proudly stood by our patients in Middlebury who weren’t there to receive abortions.”

Feminist Action at Middlebury (FAM) Co-President Annie Blalock ’20 indicated that FAM has engaged with the Title X cuts by supporting Vermont Proposition 5, an amendment to the State Constitution that is currently being deliberated in the Vermont Legislature. This amendment, if ratified, would guarantee that reproductive liberty is an unalienable right for Vermonters, regardless of restrictions on the federal level.

“[It is] empowering for the politically conscious and for those just existing in this country to actively fight against what the gag rule represents in this country,” Blalock said.

She recalled a time when FAM brought Middlebury students to the Vermont House of Representatives the day the bill was introduced, and remembered that it was astonishing to see pro-life activists alongside Planned Parenthood advocates. “That speaks to the gravity of a constitutional amendment,” she said. “We’d be the first state in the country to do something like that.”

Lucy Leriche, PPNNE's Vice President of Public Policy for Vermont, will host a workshop at Middlebury on March 11 that will train students on effective communication around reproductive justice.

"We're incredibly grateful to the Vermont Legislature and Governor Scott for reserving state funds to ensure services like affordable birth control, STD testing and treatment, and cancer screenings can continue for the 11,000 Vermonters who need this care," Sullivan said.

Sullivan also indicated that Planned Parenthood will remain committed to protecting its patients' reproductive rights regardless of current political opposition.

"Our patients, everyone, regardless of zip code, income, insurance, race, or identity, deserves expert health care and accurate reproductive health information," she said. "Our doors are open, and we're here to provide you care — no matter what."