



## **U.S. House makes history and says ‘no’ to Helms Amendment *A crucial vote for reproductive health, rights and justice***

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Contact: Noreen Fagan, Manager, Global Media Relations, Ipas, [Fagann@ipas.org](mailto:Fagann@ipas.org)

**CHAPEL HILL, NC, July 28, 2021**—Today, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPS) Fiscal Year 2022 spending bill in a historic vote. The bill includes unprecedented advances for reproductive health, rights and justice worldwide. It increases funding for bilateral family planning, increases United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) funding, permanently repeals the Global Gag Rule, and repeals the Helms Amendment for the first-time ever.

*“Today’s vote is a historic step toward global reproductive justice. For nearly 50 years, the Helms Amendment has oppressed and controlled the reproductive health and well-being of people living thousands of miles from the U.S. using the power of the purse. We know access to reproductive health care, including safe abortion, is linked to improvements in other urgent issues like basic public health, hunger and malnutrition, maternal mortality and economic growth. Foreign assistance is supposed to promote global health, not harm, as Helms has,”* says **Anu Kumar, President and CEO of Ipas.**

Every year, roughly 35 million women and girls around the world have unsafe abortions, and millions suffer injuries and disabilities as a result. The majority of these women live in low- to middle-income countries where access to safe abortion and other reproductive health services is often limited. The [Helms Amendment](#) exacerbates this preventable global health crisis by putting reproductive freedom out of reach for millions. It forces providers to distinguish between abortion and all other health services, meaning only those with means are able to access essential abortion care.

*“I believe access to abortion is health care and a human right. The Helms Amendment is harmful. It puts women’s lives at risk and health providers like me are essentially bound by bureaucratic red tape — enforced by a government on the other side of the globe. It is time for the U.S. government to remove all barriers to abortion services. Eliminating Helms will allow funding to ensure that access to abortion care is available to Kenyan women,”* says **Monica Oguttu, a nurse midwife and founder and executive director of the Kisumu Medical and Education Trust in Kenya.**

The impact of [repealing Helms](#) is dramatic: According to the Guttmacher Institute, there would be approximately 19 million fewer unsafe abortions each year and 17,000 fewer maternal deaths each year. The overall number of maternal deaths due to abortion in countries receiving U.S foreign

assistance and where abortion is legal on some grounds would decline by 98 percent. There would be 12 million fewer women each year who have abortion-related complications requiring medical treatment.

*“The Helms Amendment has contributed to the high number of maternal deaths due to unsafe abortion in Kenya. It has also contributed to the shortage of equipment and medicines used to treat women who suffer complications during pregnancy or childbirth. Restricting the use of U.S. funds for abortion hurts millions of women and puts politics over lives. Eliminating Helms is a welcome step toward the U.S. truly supporting health and equity with foreign assistance,”* says **Dr. Ernest Nyamato, who leads Ipas’s global quality of care team from Kenya.**

No one--whether in the U.S. or living in another country and receiving their health care through a USAID-funded clinic--should be denied bodily autonomy or access to critical health care.

Now is the moment for the U.S. government to be a champion for global sexual and reproductive health and rights. More than [three in four voters](#) say ensuring all people have access to the full range of reproductive health care, including abortion, is important. In fact, the majority of U.S. voters favor overturning the Helms Amendment so that foreign assistance funds can help people access abortion.

Today’s historic vote echoes Americans’ sentiments and should be a signal to the Biden Administration to support Congressional efforts to repeal the Helms Amendment for good by passing the [Abortion is Health Care Everywhere Act](#). Only when the Helms Amendment is permanently repealed will any vision of health equity and reproductive justice be realized.

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Ipas is an international reproductive health and rights organization that increases access to safe abortions and contraception. Visit <https://www.ipas.org/> for more information.