



Q&A: NLIRH's Position on Health Care Reform

What is the Latina Institute's position on the abortion provisions in the Senate health care reform proposal?

NLIRH is strongly opposed to the Nelson provision. The language requires women, their partners, or employers to make two separate payments each month for a standard insurance policy purchased through the exchange if abortion is covered. Because the Nelson provision requires insurance companies to create separate administrative systems for the coverage of abortion services, it is likely that insurance companies will simply do away with all abortion coverage. The Nelson provision will also allow for states to deny women any abortion coverage in private insurance purchased through the exchanges. Although this compromise language is framed as maintaining the 'status quo' established by the Hyde Amendment, it actually adds new barriers and burdens to women's access to abortion coverage.

Will you oppose the health care reform bill if it contains the Nelson provision?

If either Stupak's or Nelson's provisions are included in the final bill, health care reform will enact some of the most egregious and detrimental setbacks to abortion rights since the seventies. NLIRH cannot support health care reform legislation if these setbacks to essential reproductive health services are included. Latinas, immigrants, and women of color are deeply affected by any language restricting abortion access – because women of color and immigrants are disproportionately poor, they are less likely to be able to pay for reproductive care out-of-pocket, which puts them at risk for seeking alternative, unsafe abortion methods.

I understand that you oppose the Nelson provision and have been pushing for health care reform. Given that the Nelson provision is included in the president's bill, are you pushing members of Congress to vote for health care reform or against it?

NLIRH does not plan to organize opposition to the health care reform bill. However, we cannot support a bill that so blatantly leaves out our constituency.

Latinas benefit quite a bit from HCR. If passing HCR means choosing Nelson over Stupak, isn't it better to take Nelson than nothing at all?

Latinas in the U.S. have some of the highest uninsured rates of any women, and need health care reform desperately. Because of the high cost of coverage, exclusions based on immigration status, and a number of other factors, many Latinas are not receiving the critical, basic health care services that they need – it is clear that our health care system is broken in ways that disproportionately affect women of color, low-income people, and other marginalized populations. However, we will not stand silent as this battle is fought on the bodies of women and immigrants. Latinas, immigrants, and women of color are deeply affected by any language restricting abortion access – because women of color and immigrants are disproportionately poor, they are less likely to be able to pay for reproductive health care out-of-pocket, which puts them at risk for seeking alternative, unsafe abortion methods.

Moreover, while HCR might lead to more Latinas being covered, it leaves out a significant portion of the population. By excluding and stigmatizing immigrants and women who need abortions, we are pushing them to the shadows of our health care system and placing unfair burden on the already-strained system of community health care centers and emergency rooms.



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Speaker Pelosi said that the Nelson provision will not weaken a woman's access to abortion. Do you disagree with the speaker?

We respectfully disagree. We believe a two-check system will lead insurance carriers to drop abortion coverage altogether. In the end, private insurance companies are for-profit endeavors, and are not primarily concerned with issues of reproductive justice – if the administrative cost of providing abortions becomes too high, or the regulations too onerous, the service will simply be dropped.

You say you want Nelson fixed. How do you want to fix it?

The two-check provision is unworkable. This system must be eliminated to ensure that insurers continue to include abortion coverage in their plans.

Under reconciliation, Congress can't fix Nelson or immigrant inclusion. So, how can you keep saying that Congress should fix them?

It is likely that there will be a “technical fixes” bill that will pass afterwards if the health care reform bill passes through reconciliation. The Nelson provision, and provisions relating to immigrant inclusion, may be changed here.

Leadership has said that they will not address immigration in HCR because it is not an 'immigration bill.' Why does NLIRH insist on pushing immigrant issues in HCR? Why can't these issues wait until Congress addresses immigration reform later in the year?

Over half of all immigrants are women, and 53% of all immigrants are from Latin America. But if the final bill doesn't recognize and appreciate the changing face of American demographics, it will be outdated before the President's ink even dries. At a minimum, the reforms should allow undocumented immigrants to buy health insurance in the exchange, and incorporate Senator Menendez' amendment allowing states to provide optional Medicaid coverage of lawfully residing residents without a five-year waiting period. The exclusion of new immigrants from Medicaid is not only unjust, but also bad public health policy. Moreover, increased participation in the exchange will make insurance cheaper for everyone, and policies that do not allow undocumented persons to use their own money to buy insurance through the exchange are discriminatory, short-sighted, and damaging to everyone.

Including the House provisions on Puerto Rico has been touted as too expensive and would further bloat the the \$900 billion bill. For the public good, isn't the Senate plan a better option in regards to Puerto Rico?

Well, that would depend on how one defines “public.” Puerto Ricans on the island and the residents of other U.S. territories are U.S. citizens and taxpayers. NLIRH believes that the residents of the U.S. territories are part of the public, and it is unfair for them to be outright excluded from reforms that benefit the rest of the country.

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