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A Message to the House of Representatives from ACOG President Thomas Gellhaus, MD on the House Labor-HHS-Education FY 2017 Appropriations Bill's Elimination of Title X Funding, Impacts on Zika

It's hard to imagine that Congress is actually considering passing legislation that would eliminate funding for family planning services when we're looking directly at the Zika virus crisis. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), representing more than 57,000 physicians and partners in women's health, urges the House to change course on its FY 2017 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill, and restore funding for Title X family planning services. As others have said, we may not yet know how to cure Zika, but we know how to prevent pregnancies, and that's through contraception. Contraception is, in fact, our best weapon to keep moms and babies safe. This bill completely misses the mark.

Ob-gyns are on the front lines, treating women at risk of or affected by the Zika virus. Women of reproductive age who have been exposed to the virus, and women whose partners have been exposed, are especially at risk. That's a significant number of women in this country.

That's why right now, one of the best defenses against the birth defects associated with the Zika virus is preventing pregnancy in the first place – access to contraception is crucial. Title X clinics across the United States and territories play a fundamental role of providing family planning services and counseling to women at risk of exposure.

For 45 years, the Title X Family Planning program has provided low-cost reproductive health services, serving more than 4 million patients and preventing about 1 million pregnancies every year. Zeroing out funding for the Title X program would create a significant barrier to family planning services, including contraception, for women at risk of Zika exposure seeking to prevent pregnancy. Congress should pass an appropriations bill with robust funding for Title X, not one that scraps the program and cuts off access to needed care for millions of Americans.