

April 6, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Chair Tracy Hall
Kalamazoo County Commission
201 West Kalamazoo Avenue
Kalamazoo, MI 49007



Dear Chair Hall and County Commissioners:

As providers committed to ensuring all people have access to comprehensive health care including abortion care, doula support, and gender-affirming care we urge the Kalamazoo County Commission to approve the budget amendment allocating nearly \$44,000 in funding to the YWCA Kalamazoo to help ensure that all Kalamazoos can access the essential care they need.

The YWCA is preparing to launch the nation's first comprehensive Reproductive Health Fund, an innovative pilot program that will expand access to reproductive, sexual, and gender-affirming health care services for people with low-incomes, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, undocumented people, and the LGBTQIA+ community. The Reproductive Health Fund moves us one step closer towards ensuring every patient can live, work, and make decisions about their health and futures with dignity and economic security.

In its inaugural year, the Reproductive Health Fund will focus on addressing financial barriers to abortion, increasing access to doula care to promote maternal health and decrease the Black infant mortality rate, and supporting gender-affirming care by alleviating costs associated with hormone treatment, Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), name changes, and with gender marker updates.

The YWCA Kalamazoo Reproductive Health Fund is critical to addressing the maternal health crisis, among other things. It is no secret that our maternal health system is failing our patients. The existing inequities that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color face during their pregnancy and after is untenable. The United States is the only country in the world where maternal mortality is rising. Yet, we spend more money and resources on worse outcomes than any other developed nation. The Reproductive Health Fund is an important first step to addressing this crisis. Expanding access to doulas, especially for those who are part of the communities they support, can significantly improve health and birthing outcomes in patients.

Furthermore, as providers we have seen firsthand the harm that lack of insurance coverage and an inability to pay for critical reproductive health, such as abortion, has on the lives of our patients and their families. [The Turnaway Study](#), the largest longitudinal study examining the effects of unintended pregnancy on women's lives, identified serious consequences when people were denied abortion care. Women denied an abortion have a four times greater odd of living in poverty. In addition, women denied abortion are: more likely to experience serious pregnancy complications, more likely to stay with abusive partners, more likely to suffer mental health effects such as anxiety, and are less likely to have aspirational life plans for the coming year.

Gender-affirming care is medically necessary care that can be life-saving for transgender youth, and it is an essential component of comprehensive reproductive health care. As providers, we firmly believe decisions around accessing gender-affirming care should be made by patients in consultation with their providers and those they trust. Right now, many state legislatures are pushing forward anti-civil rights bills aimed at denying transgender patients, particularly transgender youth, access to the care they need. These policies are strongly opposed by medical and mental health organizations, including Physicians for Reproductive Health. We are heartened to see the YWCA

Kalamazoo Reproductive Health Fund stand on the side of transgender people and their providers by supporting access to this essential care.

We know that any barrier to essential reproductive health care makes our patients and communities less healthy and denies them the full range of quality, compassionate, health care they deserve. Currently, many Kalamazoo County residents are unable to access the care they need because of the high cost of care and lack of insurance coverage for essential health services. With the ongoing pandemic and severe economic instability, the need for affordable access to reproductive health care has only grown more urgent. Unfortunately, many essential health care services, like doulas, abortion, and gender affirming care are not covered by insurance in Michigan, forcing patients to pay out of pocket and placing them in the untenable position of choosing between paying for basic needs or paying for their health care.

Initiatives like the Reproductive Health Fund can improve the lives of our patients and will allow them to access the essential health care they need to live and thrive, regardless of how much money they have. The County Commission has an opportunity to join YWCA Kalamazoo in truly meeting the needs of the community by supporting this first of its kind Reproductive Health Fund. We urge you to approve the budget amendment allocating funding to YWCA Kalamazoo to ultimately provide necessary health care services that reflect our shared values.

Sincerely,

Anonymous MD, MPH, Ann Arbor, MI

Halley Crissman, MD, MPH, Fellow with Physicians for Reproductive Health, Michigan Section of the American College of OBGYNs, Dexter, MI

Amy Levi, PhD, CNM, WHNP-BC, Albuquerque, NM

Anonymous, Tacoma, WA

Gabriela Aguilar, MD, MPH and Kalamazoo native, Yale University, New Haven, CT

Miranda Loh, DO

Stephanie Ho, MD, VECTOR Health and Wellness, LLC, Fayetteville, AR

**Please note that organizations are listed for identification purposes only and are not intended to convey organizational endorsements*

cc: Vice Chair Tami Rey
Commissioner Zachary D. Bauer
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Commissioner Jeff Heppler
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Commissioner John H. Gisler
Commissioner Dale Shugars
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