



PENNSYLVANIA
NOW, INC.
PO Box 68
Bellefonte, PA 16823-0068

Email: Panow@panow.org
Phone: 814-280-8571
Fax: 814-355-3057

Press Release

Contact: Joanne Tosti-Vasey
Phone: (814) 280-8571

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PA NOW OPPOSES RELIGIOUS FACILITIES EXEMPTION IN SB 990

HARRISBURG, PA, NOVEMBER 13, 2006: Pennsylvania NOW opposes the current version of SB 990—also known as the Compassionate Assistance for Rape Emergencies or CARE bill. Our opposition stems from the fact that the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee gutted the original intent of the CARE bill by adding amendments that allow hospitals to opt out of providing emergency contraception (EC) to rape victims.

The original version of the bill appropriately guaranteed all rape victims information and immediate access to emergency contraception when they presented themselves at a health care facility. The current version (SB 990, PN 2109) allows health care facilities to opt out of providing EC. As amended, this bill will deny a rape victim the right to access legal, necessary and time-sensitive medications for herself should the woman need and want this medication.

Recently a woman who was raped in Lebanon County was denied emergency contraception from a hospital emergency room due to the doctor's alleged religious scruples. She was denied this medication by the hospital even when her mother called the hospital back and specifically asked for the medication for her daughter.

Incidences such as this should never happen again. If, however, the religious exemption clause remains and the bill passes in its current form, the original intent of the bill will be destroyed.

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EC is an important, safe and legal medication that all women should have access to if needed and requested by the woman.

Does a hospital corporate board's policies trump the necessary medical and healthcare needs of a rape victim? Should she be denied information and access to Emergency Contraception — which, just like penicillin — could be a life saver? The answer is NO!

The woman needs to make this decision for herself. And the only way she can make a fully informed decision is to have full information and access to emergency contraception in a timely manner.

Pennsylvania NOW therefore recommends that the PA Senate remove the amendments made in committee, revert to the original version of the bill, and then pass the CARE bill without any religious exemption clause.

Only in that way will the CARE bill protect all women across the Commonwealth from a pregnancy that resulted from a rape. Otherwise this bill should be tabled and die.

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