



Family Planning Advocates of NYS
17 Elk Street
Albany, New York 12207-1002
Phone: (518)436-8408
Fax: (518)436-0004
Website: www.fpaofnys.org
CONTACT: Susan Pedo
(518)436-8408

FPA CALLS ON LEGISLATORS TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE SERVICES ARE NOT DIMINISHED BY BERGER COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Albany (December 13, 2006)—Family Planning Advocates of New York State (FPA) today called on New York State Legislators to consider the potential impact of the Berger Commission's recommendations on women's health. The Commission's report suggests that it is acceptable to ban reproductive health services from hospitals.

In consolidating sectarian and non-sectarian hospitals, the report says that reproductive health services can be offered "at a location proximate to" the unified facility. (*Final Report of the Commission on Health Care Facilities in the 21st Century*, page 109)

"This is wholly unacceptable," said JoAnn M. Smith, president and CEO of Family Planning Advocates of New York State, who testified at Senate and Assembly hearings on the Berger Commission's recommendations. "The state, in using its power to regulate the delivery of health care services, must make decisions that promote health rather than religion."

Women's health advocates around the state testified that removing women's health care from the hospital setting is poor medical practice. Reproductive health care is intrinsically linked to women's health and wellness, and many reproductive health services are provided at the same time as other services delivered in a hospital setting.

Taking women's health services out of the hospital relegates them to second class status and further fragments the health care delivery system. Women should not be forced to leave their hospital because a religiously-affiliated hospital refuses to provide safe and legal treatment.

Governor Pataki has endorsed the Berger Commission's recommendations, leaving the State Legislature until the end of the year to consider the proposal. In a letter to New York State Legislative Leaders expressing extreme concern about the report, Smith noted that:

Reproductive health care is intrinsically connected to women's health care and should not be separated. To do so is an injustice to women that causes unnecessary and inappropriate delays in prevention and treatment...It is simply unacceptable, and unconstitutional, to place religious accommodations above the health care needs of women.

"Legislators must carefully consider whether the plan meets the health care needs of New York women," Smith concluded. "This report does not meet that criterion."

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Copies of FPA's letter to New York State Legislative Leaders on the Berger Commission's report may be obtained by calling Family Planning Advocates of New York State at 518.436.8408, x212.