

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Reps. Louise Slaughter (NY-28) and Diana DeGette (CO-1) led 59 members of the House in a letter urging Democratic appropriators to protect the health and reproductive rights of low-income women in the District of Columbia.

The letter asks appropriators to oppose language in the Fiscal Year 2012 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill that undermines D.C.'s self-government, by prohibiting local tax dollars from being used for abortions for women whose insurance is provided by the district government.

The letter was sent to Members in advance of Wednesday's Senate mark-up of the appropriations bill.

"Washington D.C. is not Congress' petri dish; we should not be using federal power to experiment with the rights of women, which is why I encourage every member of the Appropriations Committees to reject any effort to limit the District's control of local funds," said Slaughter, Co-Chair of the Pro-Choice Caucus. "Congress should not be in the business of punishing low-income women and stripping them of their constitutionally-afforded rights. I believe we'd all do well to remember that."

"Not only would this proposed language undermine the self-governing rights of the people of the District of Columbia, it would deny low-income women access to basic, constitutionally protected, medical services," said DeGette, Co-Chair of the Pro-Choice Caucus. "Congress should not violate the District's right to use its own tax dollars as it sees fit, in order to simply advance congressional Republicans' extreme assault on women's access to quality, reproductive healthcare. This intrusive initiative sadly sends a clear signal that this Congress does not believe vulnerable women are worthy of the same access to quality health as their middle-class and wealthy counterparts."

The full text of the letter is below:

September 12, 2011

Dear Democratic members of the House and Senate appropriations committees:

As you consider Fiscal Year 2012 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations legislation, we urge you to protect the District of Columbia's right to self-government as well as the health and reproductive rights of low-income women in the District of Columbia. We respectfully request that you ensure that language that undermines self-government is not included in subsequent legislation as it was in the House Appropriations committee-approved bill. Specifically, we urge you to not adopt Section 810 of the House bill, which prohibits local

tax dollars from being used for abortions for women whose insurance is provided by the District government.

The autonomy of the District is necessary for democratic self-governance, and Congress should be mindful not to violate District residents' rights to control their own tax dollars. The Home Rule Act of 1973 was a result of decades of efforts to protect the rights of District residents. Republicans have spent much of the 112th Congress interfering in local District matters. Each time Democrats accede to violations of the District's home rule, we embolden Republicans to continue their attacks.

By failing to permit the District of Columbia to spend local government funds on abortion, we are sending the message that low-income women should not have access to the same medical services that middle- and upper-income women can access. Ultimately, this prohibition may threaten the health of medically vulnerable women and deny patients the right to access constitutionally protected medical services. We must strive to expand health care services for Americans throughout the nation – not place barriers in the road of a woman seeking medical care simply because of the state, city, or district that she lives in.

The District does not have a vote in the House or Senate. But other Democrats do. We urge you to stand strong and to protect the democratic self-government of the District of Columbia.

Sincerely,

Slaughter, Louise
DeGette, Diana
Moore, Gwen
Engel, Eliot
Polis, Jared
Richardson, Laura
Nadler, Jerrold
Wasserman Schultz, Debbie
Hastings, Alcee L.
Lee, Barbara
Connolly, Gerald E.
Towns, Edolphus
Filner, Bob
Brown, Corrine
Meeks, Gregory W.
Stark, Fortney Pete
Lofgren, Zoe
Loebsack, David
Cummings, Elijah
Holt, Rush D.
Capps, Lois

Farr, Sam
Maloney, Carolyn B.
Baldwin, Tammy
McDermott, Jim
Fudge, Marcia L.
Pingree, Chellie
Payne, Donald
Grijalva, Raúl M.
Quigley, Mike
Waxman, Henry A.
Blumenauer, Earl
Braley, Bruce L.
Woolsey, Lynn
Ellison, Keith
Heinrich, Martin
Waters, Maxine
Johnson, Henry C. "Hank," Jr.
Lewis, John
Tsongas, Niki
Kucinich, Dennis J.
Rangel, Charles B.
McNerney, Jerry
Edwards, Donna F.
Green, Gene
Gonzalez, Charles A.
DeFazio, Peter A.
Chu, Judy
Speier, Jackie
Smith, Adam
Schakowsky, Janice D.
Crowley, Joseph
Peters, Gary
Welch, Peter
Matsui, Doris O.
Clarke, Yvette D.
Yarmuth, John A.
Cohen, Steve
Brady, Robert A