



Stop the Co-opting of PEPFAR:

HIV/AIDS Relief Should Not Fund Abortion or LGBT Ideology

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Key Points

The rescinding of the Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance (PLGHA) Policy in 2021 opened the door for PEPFAR funding to be directed toward abortion and/or organizations that perform abortions.

Biden administration PEPFAR guidance documents use terms known to be euphemisms for abortion and express the desire to change laws in foreign countries regarding LGBT issues.

An analysis of 107 international PEPFAR partners found that 26 were explicitly pro-abortion. Between FY21 and FY22, these 26 pro-abortion groups expended \$1.34 billion in PEPFAR funding.

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is the most substantial governmental effort to address a single disease in American history.

Since 2003, the U.S. government has dedicated more than \$100 billion to PEPFAR, and the State Department credits the program with providing life-saving care to 25 million people.¹ PEPFAR was last reauthorized in 2018 via the PEPFAR Extension Act of 2018 and is up for reauthorization again in 2023 for \$30 billion over five years (\$6 billion a year).

However, the Biden administration has sought to use PEPFAR to push a radical social agenda abroad, particularly with regard to funding abortion and promoting LGBT ideology. This is a gross misuse of PEPFAR funds and resources and does not ultimately serve PEPFAR's mission of ending HIV/AIDS.

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Origins of PEPFAR

In the late twentieth century, new drugs became available that reduced complications and increased life expectancy for HIV/AIDS patients. This medication became widely accessible in the United States but not in low-income countries, resulting in disproportionate death rates among patients in places like sub-Saharan Africa. On January 28, 2003, during his State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush announced an initiative to provide effective aid to these groups. Soon after, PEPFAR was launched under the bipartisan United States Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act.² To date, the United States has invested more than \$100 billion in PEPFAR; for FY23 alone, the funding level was \$6.9 billion.³

PEPFAR and the History of Pro-Life Protections in Foreign Assistance

Pro-life protections in foreign assistance predate PEPFAR; however, they have not always applied to PEPFAR. The Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, passed in 1973, prohibits using U.S. foreign aid “to pay for the performance of abortions as a method of family planning or to motivate or coerce any person to practice abortions.”⁴ Since the Helms Amendment is only concerned with family planning aid, PEPFAR is excluded from its pro-life protections.

In 1984, President Ronald Reagan expanded upon the Helms Amendment by implementing a policy that prevented foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that receive U.S. family planning assistance from using any funds to “perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning.”⁵ This policy, known as the Mexico City Policy, recognized that money is fungible and that U.S. aid could be indirectly funding abortion by freeing up NGO budgets to continue their pro-

abortion activities. The Mexico City Policy was rescinded by President Bill Clinton, reenacted by President George W. Bush, and rescinded again by President Barack Obama.

The Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance (PLGHA) Policy, put in place by the Trump administration in 2017, was an expanded version of the Mexico City Policy. It applied the prohibition on performing or promoting abortion to most U.S. government global health assistance rather than just family planning assistance.⁶ Thus, the PLGHA applied to PEPFAR, which had been previously excluded from the Mexico City Policy.

The last time PEPFAR was reauthorized, the PLGHA was still in effect. However, since President Joe Biden rescinded the PLGHA in 2021, the door opened for PEPFAR funding to be directed toward abortion and/or organizations that perform abortions.

Specific Examples of PEPFAR Promoting Abortion Overseas

Democrats have said there is no evidence that PEPFAR funds have gone to providing or promoting abortion.⁷ However, the Biden administration's own guidance documents for PEPFAR include ample evidence that the administration intends to insert abortion into PEPFAR's programming. PEPFAR documents repeatedly use terms like "sexual and reproductive health" or "sexual and reproductive rights," which are often euphemisms for abortion.⁸ According to the development news website Devex, one of PEPFAR's six program areas includes "Prevention, which ranges from contraceptives to voluntary circumcision programs to reproductive health education."⁹

In September 2022, the Biden administration released a document titled "Reimagining PEPFAR's Strategic Direction: Fulfilling America's Promise to End the HIV/AIDS Pandemic by 2030."

Throughout this strategy document, the Biden administration envisions abortion and contraception as essential to PEPFAR’s work. The document states:

Where possible, PEPFAR will integrate HIV programming into strengthened public health systems to manage ... *sexual reproductive health, rights and services*, as well as other local health priorities that impact PLHIV—to protect HIV/AIDS gains and strengthen health and economic outcomes.¹⁰ (Emphasis added.)

[PEPFAR will l]everage the very best of American ingenuity, including the scientific community, academic institutions, the diaspora, and faith- and community-based organizations and strengthen coordination between PEPFAR and other U.S. government global health and development programs, including for tuberculosis, malaria, *sexual and reproductive health and rights ... gender equality*, LGBTQI+, and human rights.¹¹ (Emphasis added.)

PEPFAR’s 2023 Country and Regional Operational Plan (COP/ROP) Guidance for all PEPFAR-supported countries states that PEPFAR will closely cooperate “with organizations advocating for structural, systemic, and institutional reforms in law and policy regarding sexual, reproductive, and economic services for women.”¹² Using PEPFAR to press for legislative changes regarding “reproductive services” not only detracts from PEPFAR’s mission in fighting HIV/AIDS but also actively promotes an unrelated, politically motivated pro-abortion agenda. The plan also claims that “lack of integration of *sexual and reproductive health and HIV services*” (emphasis added) for adolescent girls and young women is an obstacle to PEPFAR’s programming.¹³ The claim that PEPFAR’s mission of treating and preventing HIV/AIDS cannot function properly without integrating “reproductive health” services reveals the overt pro-abortion agenda of the current administration.

Despite the clear irrelevance abortion advocacy has in PEPFAR’s mission to treat HIV/AIDS, supporters of the initiative, such as the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), are persistent in linking the two issues. At the 52nd UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board meeting in June 2023, UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima admitted that UNAIDS views “sexual and reproductive rights” (again, a euphemism for abortion) as part of the fight against HIV/AIDS. She based her reasoning on the need to “connect people to health services to control AIDS and all pandemics” and referred to lack of abortion access as a “human rights [challenge].” Byanyima said, “UNAIDS remains committed to ensuring women and girls are empowered to stay safe from HIV and securing their sexual and reproduction rights is critical for doing so.”¹⁴ Although Byanyima runs UNAIDS, her words have implications for PEPFAR, given that PEPFAR provided \$50 million in funding for UNAIDS in FY23.¹⁵

There is reason to believe that U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator Dr. John Nkengasong, appointed by President Biden in 2022, is personally committed to abortion and LGBT ideology and incorporates that into his work. Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion business in the United States, released a statement in 2021 praising President Biden’s nomination of Nkengasong and emphasized Planned Parenthood’s plans to work with him to address HIV/AIDS:

We look forward to working together to expand access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services, including HIV prevention and treatment, equitable care for LGBTQ+ people, inclusive sex education, integrated family planning and HIV services, and ensuring no one is left behind in the global HIV response.¹⁶

PEPFAR-Funded Organizations Promote Abortion

Many of PEPFAR’s top international partners publicly support and promote abortion. An analysis of 107 international PEPFAR partners found that 26 were explicitly pro-abortion. Between FY21 and FY22, these 26 pro-abortion groups expended \$1.34 billion in PEPFAR funding.¹⁷

On June 6, 2023, Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) wrote a letter to his colleagues in Congress that exposed how PEPFAR-funded organizations work to expand abortion, including by lobbying to weaken or eliminate pro-life laws in other countries. Rep. Smith specifically cited the following examples, writing:

Population Services International (PSI) received \$96.5 million in PEPFAR funding in the last two years. PSI proudly proclaims it provides abortion and lobbies to eliminate pro-life laws. “PSI provides comprehensive abortion and post-abortion care services in nearly 20 countries throughout the world.” PSI has its own private provider network to provide abortions. PSI states that it “has launched misoprostol and mifepristone-misoprostol combination-pack brands in nearly 20 countries and supported already existing commercial brands in more than 15 countries.” PSI uses multiple media channels, including smartphone apps, chatbots, and hotlines, to educate women about abortion. **PSI lobbies to change pro-life laws in countries around the world. “PSI helped lead the effort to create Nigeria’s first national guidelines for abortion provision.”**¹⁸

Village Reach received \$10.1 million in PEPFAR funding in the last two years and used PEPFAR funds to promote abortion in Malawi and lobby for changes in pro-life laws. As part of helping Malawi establish a government-funded hotline (that included providing information and referrals for “sexual and reproductive health,” i.e., abortion), Village Reach and Planned Parenthood used PEPFAR funding through the DREAMS Innovation Challenge to create a

manual containing a whole module on “unsafe abortion and young people.” Items covered include the need to change pro-life laws to provide “services that young people need.”¹⁹

Pathfinder International received over \$5 million in PEPFAR funding in the last two years and lobbies to weaken or eliminate pro-life laws in nations around the world. Pathfinder is explicit in its promotion of abortion in other countries, stating that it is “committed to expanding access to...safe abortion.” It “[c]ollaborate[s] with governments in building the capacity of health systems to ensure quality, comprehensive abortion services[.]”²⁰

As Rep. Smith’s letter details, PEPFAR partners include organizations that clearly perform abortions. Some may say that the funds are not being used directly for abortion, but there is no meaningful oversight or accountability to back up that claim. Regardless, under PLGHA, these recipients would have been prohibited from even promoting abortion, an issue unrelated to HIV/AIDS treatment—this should always be the standard for all U.S. foreign assistance.

Rebecca Oas, director of research for the Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam), points out that pro-life protections for PEPFAR are critical precisely because “abortion has infiltrated an ever-growing list of international policy areas, including the fight against HIV.”²¹ Money given to pro-abortion organizations is always fungible, and if PEPFAR funds groups that perform or promote abortion, it is indirectly funding abortionists and abortion activists.

Pro-Life and African Leaders Express Concern

Polling indicates that a strong majority of Americans (78 percent) oppose or strongly oppose using tax dollars to fund abortion in other countries.²² Thus, a clear solution is to put pro-life protections in place for foreign assistance programs such as PEPFAR. On May 1, 2023, 31 American pro-life leaders sent a

letter to Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas), chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Sen. James Risch (R-Idaho), ranking member of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, asking them to do just that and prevent grantees or subgrantees from using taxpayer funds to fund abortion. The letter stated:

The American people do not support using taxpayer dollars to fund abortion at home or abroad. For that reason, there exists longstanding precedent not to fund abortion, directly or indirectly, through U.S. foreign assistance. We are concerned that grants from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) are used by nongovernmental organizations that promote abortions and push a radical gender ideology abroad. We urge you to ensure that any reauthorization of PEPFAR ensures that taxpayer money is not used for such purposes.²³

PEPFAR has offered much-needed treatments to recipient African countries struggling with HIV/AIDS. However, many African leaders are rightly adamant that PEPFAR funds must be dedicated to saving lives, not taking lives through the performance or promotion of abortion. In a letter to the U.S. Congress dated June 6, 2023, over 139 African political and religious leaders urged Congress to preserve the integrity of PEPFAR and prohibit it from being used to promote progressive social values. Political leaders from Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Namibia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe and high-profile religious leaders from Zambia and Kenya signed the letter,²⁴ which stated:

We were also grateful that the original strategy respected our values and focused PEPFAR on protecting and preserving life and emphasizing abstinence and responsible behavior and practices. As you now seek to reauthorize PEPFAR funding, we want to express our concerns and suspicions that this funding is supporting so-called family planning and reproductive health principles and practices, including abortion, that violate our core beliefs concerning life, family, and religion.²⁵

We ask that PEPFAR remain true to its original mission and respect our norms, traditions, and values. We ask that those partner organizations with whom the U.S. government partners to implement PEPFAR programs in ways that are cognizant and respectful of our beliefs and not cross over into promoting divisive ideas and practices that are not consistent with those of Africa.²⁶

The Biden Administration Is Using PEPFAR to Promote LGBT Ideology

For the Biden administration, PEPFAR is not just a medical program—it is a platform to advance a radical social agenda around the world. The Biden administration’s “Reimagining PEPFAR” document also indicates that PEPFAR will fund activism programs to push “LGBTQI+ rights.” The document states:

Additionally, PEPFAR will collaborate with partners to dismantle the social and structural barriers that hold back progress in the global HIV response by addressing equity for women and girls, and LGBTQI+ persons around the world.²⁷

In PEPFAR’s 2018 Country Operational Plans, the U.S. State Department emphasized that key populations PEPFAR would focus on include “men who have sex with men, transgender individuals, sex workers, people who inject drugs (PWID), and people in prisons and other closed settings.”²⁸ PEPFAR’s Key Populations Investment Fund (KPIF) is a \$100 million initiative targeted towards PEPFAR’s key populations.²⁹ PEPFAR’s 2023 Country and Regional Operational Plan (COP/ROP) Guidance further states that PEPFAR will “[c]onsider intersectionality across PEPFAR programs to ensure equitable and inclusive patient outcomes across race/color, gender identity/sexual orientation, and age groups.”³⁰

In April 2023, U.S. Global Aids Coordinator John Nkengasong and PEPFAR Senior Advisor for Health Equity Policy Jirair Ratevosian co-authored an article in *The Lancet* that criticized pro-family policies in the United States and around the world:

In 2023 there has been an alarming tide of anti-LGBTQI+ legislation and repressive government policies and practices in the USA and around the world. ... In 2021, President Biden released a new US National HIV/AIDS Strategy (2022–25) that encourages reform of state HIV criminalisation laws and policies. The US PEPFAR strategy, Fulfilling America's Promise to End the HIV/AIDS Pandemic by 2030, brings intentional focus and resources to close equity gaps to reach and effectively support populations who are especially vulnerable to HIV, including dismantling of structural barriers, transforming the delivery of services to key populations through leadership from key populations, leading the global movement to end AIDS in children, and advancing gender equitable programming.³¹

In June 2022, Nkengasong put out a press release for Pride Month, touting that PEPFAR “stands with members of the LGBTQI+ community.”³² The press release stated, “PEPFAR will continue to prioritize key populations, including those among the LGBTQI+ community.” On June 30, 2023, Nkengasong posted a Pride Month message on Twitter with a Pride flag:

@PEPFAR is commitment to equitable access to quality HIV prevention, care and treatment services for all; which is critical to ending HIV/AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. We stand united with @UNAIDS @GlobalFund and our other partners in ensuring equitable services for LGBTQI+ and all persons. #Pride³³

Not only is PEPFAR taking measures to advance LGBT ideology around the world, but PEPFAR officials are condemning pro-family efforts undertaken by political leaders in the United States and

other countries. The United States must not undo the goodwill that PEPFAR has earned us by using the program to promote abortion or LGBT ideology, which are controversial and divisive issues that contradict many of the more religious societies that benefit from PEPFAR.

PEPFAR Should Not Be Politicized

The Biden administration's intention to expand PEPFAR into abortion and LGBT ideology, regardless of (or even especially in opposition to) many recipient nations' existing pro-life and pro-family protections, could not be clearer. PEPFAR funds should not be used to promote the Biden administration's radical social policies on abortion and LGBT ideology overseas. Congress should closely examine the program and recalibrate it to its intended purpose: eradicating the scourge of HIV/AIDS in the developing world. Abortion and gender ideology do not cure any diseases and have no place in America's fight against HIV/AIDS.

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