

To: Planned Parenthood affiliate CEOs and Planned Parenthood Senior Leadership Team

Subject: My departure from Planned Parenthood

Dear Colleagues,

One year ago, when I came in front of the Search Committee selecting Planned Parenthood's next President, I posed this question: Did they see Planned Parenthood as an advocacy organization first, with medical services that are necessary to strengthen its impact, or did they see Planned Parenthood as a health care organization first, with advocacy as a necessary vehicle to protect rights and access? For me, as a doctor and a public health leader, the answer was straightforward: providing essential primary and preventive care to millions of underserved women and families should always be the driving force of Planned Parenthood's work. As I said to the Search Committee, I believe that at this critical juncture in our nation's history, there is an opportunity to make clear what we in medicine know to be true: that improving women's health is critical to the health, stability and security of families and communities; that the attacks on reproductive rights are causing a public health crisis; and that the best way to protect abortion care is to contextualize it—to treat reproductive health care as the fundamental health care that it is.

In September 2018, the Boards of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and the Planned Parenthood Action Fund unanimously voted for me as their President. Since then, I have led the Federation to focus relentlessly on our North Star—the patients and communities we serve. We launched national campaigns (“This is Health Care” and “Protect X”) to raise awareness of reproductive health care as health care and the irreplaceable role of Planned Parenthood in providing cancer screenings, affordable birth control, abortion care, and other key medical services in communities around the country. We began public health initiatives that built upon work already being done through our affiliates, including to expand maternal health care, mental health services, and substance addiction prevention and treatment. We started working with our affiliate leaders on a strategic vision that would provide, protect, and expand access to care, that includes applying an emergency preparedness framework to secure abortion access, investing in market analyses and health center operations to reduce reproductive health deserts, and focusing on specific areas of need such as trans-health and diversity, equity, and inclusion. We declared a state of emergency for women's health with a report that garnered widespread media attention; enhanced work in health equity; and strengthened cross-movement partnerships including around the census and immigrant health.

While prioritizing health care has been our mission, we've also fought back unprecedented assaults to our patients' health, rights, and fundamental freedoms. When the Trump administration attempted to take away health care from 4 million people, we joined the American Medical Association to sue them over the unethical and dangerous Title X gag rule. Our mobilization resulted in 21 Attorneys General joining a

parallel lawsuit; more than 160 celebrities signing onto a full-page ad in *Variety* in support of Title X; and the U.S. House of Representatives passing a Title X protection clause. We launched “Bans Off My Body” to serve as a rallying cry for autonomy and equality in response to the cruel and severe attacks on women’s health care.

When we were faced with an unprecedented number of extreme abortion bans, we successfully defeated numerous state bans and passed more proactive legislation to protect abortion access than any year in recent history. When Missouri came within hours of becoming the first state in the country to lose access to abortion care since 1974, we launched a media and organizing campaign that included leading more than 500 National Day of Action activities and declaring a nationwide state of emergency for women’s health. As a result of our efforts, the “abortion care is health care” message has caught on, and public opinion has shifted. Support for *Roe vs. Wade* is at the highest point in history (77%). Planned Parenthood now has more than 13 million supporters and counting—1 million more since 2018. Over 100 medical and public health groups have publicly stood with us. Together with our partners at ACLU, NARAL, and CRR, we brought together nearly 200 executives in a *New York Times* ad to speak out against the bans. And last month, for the first time in recent history, the Planned Parenthood Action Fund hosted a presidential forum dedicated to women’s health and reproductive rights; 20 candidates attended and publicly responded to questions from patient storytellers to demonstrate their commitment to abortion care and reproductive health.

There is a lot more work ahead. I am leaving the organization sooner than I’d hoped because of philosophical differences about the direction and future of Planned Parenthood. I came to Planned Parenthood to run a national health care organization and to advocate for the broad range of public health policies that affect our patients’ health: ensuring access to quality, affordable health care—which includes the full spectrum of reproductive health care—for all; improving maternal health and the health of women before, during, and after pregnancy; increasing programs for cancer detection and STI/HIV treatment; and calling attention to the social determinants of health like food insecurity and housing instability that deeply affect people’s health and widen rampant disparities. The new Board leadership has determined that the priority of Planned Parenthood moving forward is to double down on abortion rights advocacy. With the landscape changing dramatically in the last several months and the right to safe, legal abortion care under attack like never before, I understand the shift in the Board’s prioritization. I will continue my life’s work and mission of caring for and fighting for women, families, and communities, and I will do everything I can to ensure a smooth transition in leadership.

As a former patient, I will always be grateful to Planned Parenthood for the exceptional health care and education it provided me at a time in my life when I couldn’t get care anywhere else. As a physician, I will always be proud to have represented an organization that has taken care of one in three women in America—along with men, LGBTQ people, and people across this country in need of care. As a public health leader and advocate, I will always be in awe of all those in the national office and our

affiliates who are the best fighters for our rights and our freedoms that I've ever met. As your President, I will always be inspired by all the incredible affiliate CEOs, doctors, nurses, clinicians, staff, and volunteers who are the living embodiment of what it means to show up for our patients, no matter what.

To all of you, the tens of thousands of dedicated people who are on the frontlines every day, providing life-saving, life-transforming care and fighting to protect access to that care: you are my heroes. Thank you for what you do.

It has been an honor and privilege to serve alongside you. I will always stand with Planned Parenthood.

In this together, always,
Leana S. Wen, M.D. M.Sc. FAAEM