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CONTACT: Elizabeth Dawes Gay, Reproductive Health Technologies Project  
202-530-4401

**HHS: Remove Emergency Contraception Restrictions Now**  
*Advocates Urge Sebelius to Prioritize Women's Health Over Politics*  
*One-Year After She Overruled FDA*

(WASHINGTON, DC) --- One year ago, December 7, 2011, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius overruled the Food Drug Administration (FDA) and insisted on keeping Plan B One Step® emergency contraception restricted behind the pharmacy counter. To mark the anniversary, more than 40 organizations representing millions of Americans have signed a letter urging Secretary Sebelius to revisit the evidence and remove the restrictions. The coalition letter is part of an extended public awareness campaign that has galvanized support from citizens, scientists, medical professionals and women's health advocates.

"Emergency contraception needs to be on the pharmacy shelf between condoms and pregnancy test kits, available to women and couples without hassle or delay," said Kirsten Moore, President and CEO of Reproductive Health Technologies Project, the organizer of the coalition effort. "Doctors are leading the way saying that all contraception should move over-the-counter and be available to women of all ages. Politicians need to follow the doctors' lead and get politics out of women's health once and for all," Moore added, referring to recent announcements by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the American Academy of Pediatricians encouraging easier access to oral contraception and emergency contraception for teens.

Many believe Sebelius' unprecedented action last year was more about politics than health care. "Government's role is to determine the safety and effectiveness of products, to protect consumers from harm, not to make it difficult for consumers to take care of their health," Moore said. "Emergency contraception has been studied and debated for a decade, and it has been determined to be safe and effective for all ages, so the government should get out of the way and let consumers decide what is best for them," she added.

In addition to the coalition letter, the campaign urging HHS to act featured a video explaining how EC works from [ASAPScience](#), and another featuring a couple discussing how they were [refused EC by a pharmacist](#). A recording of an [audio news conference](#) held on the issue can be found at RH Reality Check, and [social media tools](#) have helped citizens engage. [Petitions](#) from various organizations are urging HHS to act and so far have gathered nearly 40,000 signatures collectively. The full context of the coalition letter follows:

December 7, 2012

Secretary Kathleen Sebelius  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building  
Washington, D.C., 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

We write to respectfully ask HHS to revisit the evidence regarding non-prescription access for Plan B One-Step emergency contraception (EC) and to remove the restrictions that prevent this safe and effective product from being accessible to women and couples who need it. In the year since overruling the conclusions of FDA experts, barriers such as age, valid identification, and less than universal availability have continued to undermine timely access by those who need this product to prevent unintended pregnancy. Scientific research and expert opinions support removal of any age restriction and moving this safe and effective medication from behind the pharmacy counter to store shelves.

The unique dual-labeling of Plan B One Step has led to confusion among consumers and health care professionals alike, particularly regarding age restrictions and whether men and women can purchase non-prescription EC. A recent Boston University study of 943 pharmacies in five major cities revealed that, when callers posed as 17 year olds seeking EC, one in five were told they could not purchase EC under any circumstances.<sup>1</sup> Pharmacies gave more than half of all young people and physicians in the study inaccurate information about how old a patient has to be to purchase emergency contraception. The investigators conclude that, “such misinformation poses a potentially substantial barrier to access.”

These obstacles can easily be avoided by making emergency contraception - which has continuously been determined by the FDA to be safe and effective - available on store shelves without unnecessary and harmful age restrictions. Medical societies, journals, and experts - including the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Society of Adolescent Health and Medicine, the American College of Clinical Pharmacy Women’s Health Practice and Research Network, and a former U.S. Surgeon General - disagreed with HHS’s decision to maintain unnecessary and harmful age restrictions on access to emergency contraception. Current data suggests that access to emergency contraception does not increase sexual activity; rather, the evidence shows that access to emergency contraception gives teens who are already sexually-active another option to prevent an unintended pregnancy.<sup>2</sup>

Plan B One-Step was extensively studied during its ten-year journey through the FDA science-based approval process, and its safety and efficacy are not in question. It is essential that HHS remove harmful and unnecessary restrictions on Plan B One-Step, both to improve access to contraception and to reinforce that politics has no place in FDA approval processes, now or in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkinson T et al. Pharmacy Communication to Adolescents and Their Physicians Regarding Access to Emergency Contraception. *Pediatrics*. 2012;129(4):624-629.

<sup>2</sup> Weiss DC, Harper CC, Speidel JJ, Raine TR. Does Emergency Contraception Promote Sexual Risk-Taking? Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health, University of California, San Francisco. April 2008.

Signed,

Advocates for Youth  
American Association of University Women  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Society for Emergency Contraception  
American Society for Reproductive Medicine  
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals  
Black Women's Health Imperative  
California Family Health Council  
Catholics for Choice  
Center for Reproductive Rights  
Choice USA  
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights  
Family Planning Association of Northeast Ohio, Inc.  
Gynuity Health Projects  
Ibis Reproductive Health  
Jacob's Institute of Women's Health  
Law Students for Reproductive Justice  
Metropolitan Community Churches  
NARAL Pro-Choice America  
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum  
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Institute for Reproductive Health  
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health  
National Organization for Women  
National Partnership for Women and Families  
National Women's Health Network  
National Women's Law Center  
National Women's Liberation  
Partnership for Civil Justice Fund  
Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America and all Planned Parenthood Affiliates Nationwide  
Population Connection  
Population Council  
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice  
Religious Institute  
Reproductive Health Technologies Project  
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S.  
The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church & Society  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health  
Women of Reform Judaism  
Women's Reproductive Rights Assistance Project  
WV FREE

Amy S. Gottlieb, M.D. - The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University  
Beth Lewis, MD  
Clace Cleaver-Felice, BA, BS, RD, CDE, AFAA, ACE – Meridian Medical Associates  
Cynthia H. Chuang, M.D., M.Sc. - Penn State College of Medicine  
Diane S. Morse, MD - University of Rochester School of Medicine  
Eleanor Bimla Schwarz, MD, MS – University of Pittsburgh  
Ellen Chesler, Ph.D. Senior Fellow, the Roosevelt Institute  
Frances C. Brokaw MD - Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center  
Jamie Stern, MD  
Lawrence I Kaplan, MD FACP - Temple University School of Medicine  
Michael P. Carson, MD - UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School  
Nancy A. Rigotti, MD - Harvard Medical School  
Nancy L. Keating, MD, MPH - Harvard Medical School  
Rachel Hess, MD, MS - Center for Research on Health Care  
Richard M. Abramowitz, MD, FACP, FACOEM - Jersey Shore University Medical Center  
Sally Rafie, PharmD – University of California San Diego Skaggs School of Pharmacy and  
Pharmaceutical Sciences  
Tsonwin Hai, Ph.D. - Ohio State University  
Vic Strasburger, M.D. – University of New Mexico