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**Health plans join providers, advocates supporting protections for no copay birth control**  
*Legislative committee hears overwhelming support for affordable, accessible contraception*

**BOSTON**-Massachusetts health plans and reproductive rights advocates joined together to call for the passage of compromise legislation that would expand access to affordable birth control and safeguard against continued efforts on the federal level to limit access to this basic, preventive care.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Association of Health Plans and the Coalition for Choice led activists, patients, and providers in testifying before the Joint Committee on Financial Services in support of a redraft of the Contraceptive ACCESS bill (S 499, H 536).

The compromise bill would guarantee insurance coverage without cost-sharing for all FDA-approved methods of birth control, where there is a therapeutic equivalent. Cost sharing would be permitted as long as at least one drug, device or product is included and covered without cost-sharing. The revised bill builds on the current protections established by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and protects Massachusetts residents from proposed changes to the federal law's contraceptive coverage requirements. The agreement would codify the ACA's requirement of no cost-sharing for over-the-counter emergency contraception dispensed with a prescription and expand the requirement to allow for access and no cost-sharing through a standing order written by a woman's physician. Finally, the compromise would require insurers to cover a 12-month supply of birth control in a single dispensing after a successful completion of an initial three-month prescription, which is an expansion on current ACA requirements.

"Providers, patients, and insurers agree affordable and accessible birth control is imperative for keeping women and families healthy and helping them thrive. Massachusetts can prioritize the health and well-being of each and every one of its residents by recognizing the critical role contraception plays in strengthening communities and passing this commonsense legislation," said Dr. Jennifer Childs-Roshak, president of Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts. PPAF currently chairs the Coalition for Choice, a coalition of organizations dedicated to protecting reproductive rights and expanding health care access.

The ACA recognizes contraception as preventive care that should be available without additional costs. By removing co-pays for contraception, the ACA improved access to the full scope of contraception methods, enabling women to choose the method that worked best for them. This in turn helped more women manage menstrual symptoms, prevent unintended pregnancy, and focus on their futures. This benefit is under threat as efforts to dismantle the ACA and other critical health care protections persist.

"We're proud to support this legislation because we believe it's the right thing to do," said Andrew Dreyfus, President & CEO at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. "Contraceptive services are an important element of health care coverage. We strongly support fundamental access to the type of contraception that best meets an individual's needs, while encouraging the use of cost-effective options."

"Our member health plans recognize the importance of contraceptive coverage and that the type of contraceptive a woman chooses is a personal one. Unfortunately, efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and limit access to contraceptives have created unnecessary uncertainty for millions of Massachusetts women," said Lora Pellegrini, President & CEO of the Massachusetts Association of Health Plans. "We are pleased to be able to work with legislative leaders and the Coalition for Choice on a sensible approach that will provide women in the Commonwealth with the confidence that they will continue to have access to this important benefit regardless of what happens at the federal level, while being mindful of our state's focus on cost containment."

Thanks to this ACA benefit, 55 million women – including 1.4 million in Massachusetts – have guaranteed access to birth control at no additional cost. In addition to the multiple attempts by Congress to repeal the ACA, a leaked draft federal rule that allows businesses to deny employees birth control coverage for a religious or an undefined moral reason is could be finalized at any time. Once finalized, it will go into effect immediately.

"The amount of money a person has—or doesn't have—shouldn't determine their access to effective birth control. And their access to reproductive care damn sure shouldn't be influenced by their boss's religious views." Carol Rose, Executive Director of the ACLU of Massachusetts, said.

Ellen Duffer, a Massachusetts resident who relies on oral contraception to manage menstrual migraines, said if she no longer had access to no copay birth control she would have to choose between the medication that prevents debilitating pain or groceries.

"This is not a decision anyone should have to make. The cost of contraception should not be a barrier to staying healthy and remaining productive members of society," said Duffer. "With contraception, I, and so many others in the state of Massachusetts, can continue to lead lives free of the debilitating migraines, cramps, nausea, anxiety, and depression that are characteristic of menstruation, while also preventing pregnancy. With birth control access, we can continue to contribute to our families, jobs, and communities."

In addition to hearing from insurers and health care providers, the committee received more than 100 pieces of testimony in support of the redrafted ACCESS bill from a wide array of organizations, including the Women's Bar Association, Alliance for Business Leadership, the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, and League of Women Voters.

"Now is the moment for Massachusetts to draw a line in the sand and tell the Trump administration that in Massachusetts, we stand together to protect the reproductive freedom of Bay Staters like Ellen," said Rebecca Hart-Holder, executive director of NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts. "It is a unique moment when the pro-choice and insurance communities come together to ensure that Massachusetts women will not be used as a political football in the federal debate on health insurance. In partnering together, the pro-choice community and the insurance community stand united in our belief that women in Massachusetts deserve copay-free contraceptive coverage. Now is the moment for Massachusetts to draw a line in the sand and tell the Trump administration that in Massachusetts, we stand together to protect the reproductive freedom of Bay Staters."