

July 14, 2016

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan,

We are writing to you as reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations deeply committed to protecting and expanding access to abortion. We demand that you act immediately to put an end to the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Select Investigative Panel (the Panel). The Panel's baseless attacks on access to safe, legal abortion impede life-saving medical research and threaten the lives and safety of researchers and doctors.

We join the 181 House Democrats who have urged you to disband this dangerous panel, as well as the 26 organizations which this week made the same request.

The Panel was founded upon highly-edited and misleading videos released by anti-abortion extremists, that have been discredited time and time againⁱ, including by a Texas grand jury. In fact, the Texas grand jury instead indicted the extremists that created these falsified videos.ⁱⁱ Texas and a dozen other states also launched investigations into Planned Parenthood as a result of the videos and failed to find any evidence of wrongdoing. Yet, in a desperate attempt to justify its existence, the Panel is violating House rules and customs and continues to use bullying and fishing tactics to find new ways of targeting researchers, physicians, and patients.

The impact on research and medical progress has been devastating. Fetal tissue is critical to the development of cures and treatments for life-threatening and debilitating diseases like Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, and the Zika virus. The Panel's actions have intimidated researchers and stymied this important work.ⁱⁱⁱ Those who stand to suffer as a result of the Panel's politicization of science are not just the researchers, but anyone who could benefit from this type of medical research—including millions of Americans,^{iv} as well as the mothers and their babies affected by Zika around the world. Chair Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) has dubbed it the "Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives"^v, and yet Members of your caucus on the Panel have ignored scientists who have testified that fetal tissue research is essential to understanding the Zika virus's impact on fetal development,^{vi} and to a variety of therapies and treatments designed to support infant health.^{vii}

Moreover, violence towards abortion providers dramatically increased after the release of the extremist videos. While Chair Blackburn and the majority members of the Panel are keenly aware of this, their actions have contributed to the problem. In a blatant abuse of congressional authority, the majority has leaked unredacted documents with the names of abortion providers, other physicians, researchers, and even research students involved in fetal tissue research to the media and to anti-abortion extremists.^{viii,ix} The Panel continues to issue subpoenas without first seeking voluntary compliance from outside parties, a largely unprecedented tactic.^x Members of your caucus on the Panel have continued their fishing expedition with no regard for the safety of providers and researchers, giving anti-abortion extremists personal information that can be used to harm them.

With funding from an account under your control, the Panel has been allowed to continue this destructive investigation in a manner that flouts Congressional standards and common decency. It continues to waste taxpayer dollars—reportedly as much as \$790,000 and counting^{xi}—on a witch hunt that puts people’s lives and well-being at risk.

We urge you to disband the Panel and end this thinly-veiled attempt to restrict access to abortion care.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth
American Civil Liberties Union
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals
Catholics for Choice
Center for Reproductive Rights
Feminist Majority Foundation
If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Institute for Science and Human Values
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Abortion Federation
National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Network of Abortion Funds
National Organization for Women (NOW)
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women's Health Network
National Women’s Law Center
PAI
People For the American Way
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Population Connection Action Fund
Reproductive Health Technologies Project
Secular Coalition for America
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity

cc: Hon. Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader
Hon. Fred Upton, Chair, House Energy and Commerce Committee
Hon. Frank Pallone, Ranking Member, House Energy and Commerce Committee
Hon. Marsha Blackburn, Chair, Select Investigative Panel
Hon. Jan Schakowsky, Ranking Member, Select Investigative Panel

ⁱDana Milbank, “Republicans finish discrediting their Planned Parenthood investigation,” *The Washington Post*, April 20, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/republicans-complete-the-discrediting-of-their-planned->

ⁱⁱ Manny Fernandez, “2 Abortion Foes Behind Planned Parenthood Videos Are Indicted,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 25, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/26/us/2-abortion-foes-behind-planned-parenthood-videos-are-indicted.html?emc=edit_na_20160125&nliid=704474&ref=headline&r=1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Danielle Paquette, “‘We lose money doing this’: Tiny company caught in abortion debate takes on Congress,” *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/05/27/critics-say-theyre-selling-baby-body-parts-they-say-theyre-saving-lives/>.

^{iv} Kathleen Cullen, “Don’t stop the clock on medical research,” *The Hill*, June 27, 2016, <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/healthcare/284854-dont-stop-the-clock-on-medical-research>

^v The Energy and Commerce Committee, “Select Investigative Panel,” <https://energycommerce.house.gov/select-investigative-panel>, accessed June 28, 2016.

^{vi} Erick Check Hayden, “Zika Highlights Role of Controversial Fetal Tissue Research,” *Nature International Weekly Journal of Science*, March 30, 2016, <http://www.nature.com/news/zika-highlights-role-of-controversial-fetal-tissue-research-1.19655>.

^{vii} Steven H. Miles, “Fetal research both saves and betters lives,” *StarTribune*, July 27, 2015, <http://www.startribune.com/fetal-research-both-saves-and-betters-lives/318719001/>.

^{viii} Erick Check Hayden, “Zika Highlights Role of Controversial Fetal Tissue Research,” *Nature International Weekly Journal of Science*, March 30, 2016, <http://www.nature.com/news/zika-highlights-role-of-controversial-fetal-tissue-research-1.19655>.

^{ix} Christine Grimaldi, “Unredacted Documents Link Blackburn Investigation, Anti-Choice Front Group,” *Rewire News*, June 24, 2016, <https://rewire.news/article/2016/06/24/unredacted-documents-link-blackburn-investigation-anti-choice-front-group/>.

^x Memorandum from Select Investigative Panel Democratic Staff, to Democratic Members of the Select Investigative Panel, “Status Report,” May 25, 2016, https://selectpaneldems-energycommerce.house.gov/sites/default/files/2016_05_25_Select_Panel_Dem_Status_Update.pdf.

^{xi} Christine Grimaldi, “Blackburn Abortion Investigation Set for Congressional Windfall,” *Rewire*, July 1, 2016, <https://rewire.news/article/2016/07/01/blackburn-abortion-investigation-set-congressional-windfall/>.