

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

January 23, 2023

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator of United States Agency for International Development
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power:

We write today to express our concern that diplomats and other employees of the State Department and USAID working abroad are being routinely denied access to reproductive healthcare. Nearly a year ago, you received a letter from more than 200 State and USAID employees decrying the lack of consistent access to reproductive healthcare available to employees working overseas. Specifically, women employees raised concerns over inconsistent availability of: (1) rape kits; (2) family planning services, including emergency contraceptives and medical abortion; and (3) access to trained professionals, including obstetrician-gynecologists. We seek to gain clarity on how you plan to remedy this situation.

We applaud the Biden administration's commitments to ensuring women's rights and access to reproductive healthcare. In the first National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, the Biden administration asserted: "Health care is a right—not a privilege. All people deserve access to high-quality, affordable healthcare...we will...promote access to sexual and reproductive health and rights both at home and abroad." We struggle to reconcile the National Strategy's vision with the experience of women working for the State Department and USAID who are asked to carry out the important objectives of that strategy and yet lack access to adequate reproductive healthcare themselves. We urge you to take immediate action to effectuate the policies outlined in this strategy.

Women working in U.S. embassies, missions, and consulates abroad deserve reliable access to healthcare—including reproductive healthcare. We urge you to guarantee their right to such care by updating the policies and procedures that govern the operations of the State Department and USAID, including by codifying the right to reproductive healthcare into the Foreign Affairs Manual. We are also concerned by reports that employees who experience sexual assault or rape while serving overseas may not have access to reproductive health services and other appropriate

care. Clearly, post-sexual assault care is essential healthcare, and so should be available to every person working for the U.S. Government overseas.

While we are aware that the State Department and USAID have launched a Women's Health Working Group, we seek to better understand how these inequities will be adequately addressed. To that end, we ask that you answer the following questions by February 6, 2023:

1. What new resources have the State Department and USAID committed to address ongoing concerns that women employees have inequitable access to healthcare services abroad?
2. How will post-sexual assault and post-rape care be incorporated into these efforts to ensure anyone who is sexually assaulted overseas while working under chief of mission authority has access to appropriate healthcare? What efforts are being made to train appropriate staff in responding to reports of sexual assault or rape?
3. What actions will you be taking in the next six months to guarantee women access to reproductive healthcare while working overseas? Will those actions include making the necessary updates to the Foreign Affairs Manual?
4. What is your timeline for permanently institutionalizing the right to reproductive healthcare access in your policies and procedures?

We firmly believe that women working for the State Department and USAID abroad are essential to advancing U.S. foreign policy objectives. It is critical—both for their well-being and for the mission of these agencies—that women employees of the State Department and USAID be provided access to adequate healthcare. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Chairman



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator