



Planned Parenthood Advocates in Missouri

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Missourians demonstrate at State Capitol over legislative malpractice on health care

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Advocates from across the state demonstrated at the Missouri Capitol this morning in response to legislators ignoring public health crises in favor of political fights.

Citizen activists joined reproductive rights organizers from Planned Parenthood Advocates for [a demonstration](#) before hitting the hallways to speak directly to their state legislators about the real public health concerns being ignored this legislative session.

Over the past several years, Missouri has seen a statewide increase of [more than 200% in syphilis cases](#), a devastating illness once thought dormant. Nearly 30 Missouri counties have seen a triple-digit percentage increase in syphilis cases since 2015, including a 349% increase in House Speaker Elijah Haahr's home county of Greene. Dunklin, Cole, Audrain, Calloway and Newton counties all saw increases of more than 1000% from 2015 to 2018.

"Lawmakers have a responsibility to protect public health and ensure Missourians can access STI testing and treatment," said Larissa Breshears, an advocate from Springfield. "Any move to 'defund' Planned Parenthood would be a step in the wrong direction – we need more places to get health care, not fewer."

Missouri Director of Health and Senior Services Dr. Randall Williams issued a [health advisory](#) in February 2019 warning of the dangerous increases in syphilis, including the highest number of congenital syphilis cases in nearly two decades.

But the Missouri Legislature has ignored the issue, trying instead to block patients from accessing preventive health care at Planned Parenthood through a ["defunding" measure](#) in the budget. Planned Parenthood health centers in Missouri provided nearly 80,000 testing and

treatment services for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including syphilis, in Missouri last year.

Syphilis can be easily cured with treatment, but without treatment, it can lead to serious, permanent problems like brain damage, paralysis, and blindness. With an outbreak this serious, our elected officials should be focused on making sure everyone can access the health care they need – not blocking patients from Planned Parenthood.

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Planned Parenthood Advocates in Missouri works to protect and expand sexual and reproductive rights and health for all Missourians. It is a joint project of Planned Parenthood Great Plains Votes and Advocates of Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri, the political and advocacy arms of both Planned Parenthood affiliates in Missouri.