

A one-year reauthorization is a really bad idea

Dear Pro-Life Friends,

1. PEPFAR is a program that saves lives, both of the living and the unborn. It does not take away lives, especially of the unborn. The very aggressive program within PEPFAR is done by preventing the transmission of the HIV virus from mother to infant either before birth or through breast feeding. Millions of infants have been saved from horrible deaths through this life-saving program. We have witnessed it with our own eyes, and it is truly miraculous. For those of us who were involved in the HIV/AIDS issue before anti-retroviral treatment stopped mother to child transmissions, it was horrifying and tragic seeing so many little ones suffer and perish.
2. PEPFAR'S strength has been its bi-partisan support, bringing together so many people of different backgrounds, beliefs, political views, religions, ethnicities, and the like. All made concessions to make the program possible with the pro-life community gaining both protections against abortion (Helms and Siljander) and conscience protections for people of faith. Mexico City Policy was not included in the original legislation because President Bush wanted any organization that had health assets or significant programs in Africa to be eligible to begin treating large numbers of people immediately. It turns out Mexico City Policy has only been in place four years of PEPFAR'S twenty-year history with no abortions ever occurring with PEPFAR resources. Trying to insert additional legislation at this point violates the bi-partisan nature of the program and inserts ill-will.
3. While there has been no evidence found to support the rumor that PEPFAR is a six-billion-dollar slush fund for abortion as described by some of its opponents, some still believe that to be true. Either a one-year or a five-year reauthorization would still be harmful if one believes that rumor is true, so voting for either would be hypocritical. However, a one-year reauthorization sends a message by those who believe PEPFAR funds abortion that having one more year of abortions would be acceptable in some way. That makes no sense. The pro-life faith community that works in virtually every country PEPFAR operates have not seen or heard of a single instance of abortion and should be listened to on this issue.
4. Some have said a one-year reauthorization will put us into a different political season. That is true: into the middle of a highly politicized election year. That would put PEPFAR into the realm of the unknown, and less likely to have a favorable outcome than it would today. No arguments would have changed unless having another year to find proof of abortions is one's goal. By now, everyone interested in

this has looked for such proof and none has been found. When something has never happened, it is impossible any such proof could ever be found.

5. PEPFAR is a highly structured program with very specific goals, country by country. The already defined end date to accomplish its very ambitious goals is 2030. Any interruption in the work required to meet those goals immediately puts the program in jeopardy of the success it's on schedule to achieve. Without surety of a stable and continuously funded program, including a highly complex supply chain of medications, over the next five years we are putting one of the best federal programs ever launched in jeopardy. Lack of a long-term commitment to a given region – such as through a one-year reauthorization – will compromise the effectiveness and success of this well-managed program.
6. For those who would like to see the Mexico City Policy added legislatively to PEPFAR it will require a Republican President, a Republican House of Representatives, and a super majority Republican Senate to be enacted into law. Are those requirements realistic to achieve in 2024? It's highly doubtful that will occur as much as I would like to see it happen. Unfortunately, those in favor of having the Mexico City Policy added now give the appearance that they are using PEPFAR as a political chip to get what they otherwise can't achieve legislatively, as well as violating the spirit of this bi-partisan legislation.
7. The other side of a 2024 election scenario may prove to be far worse to PEPFAR and the things the pro-life faith community sees as extremely important, namely the conscience provision – which allows the faith community to work unencumbered in PEPFAR – vanish. It would take us back to the time when the faith community was intentionally excluded from participation in many government programs. Other provisions such as the orphan and vulnerable children earmark, as well as the important treatment earmark could be lost. We are playing with fire if the outcome of the debate does not end with a five-year reauthorization.
8. At this point a lot of damage has been done to our African brothers and sisters. Increasing numbers of news articles from Africa are characterizing the U.S. pro-life community negatively. These reauthorization arguments are creating a sense of insecurity for those on anti-viral treatment. A short term, one-year reauthorization will worsen this sense of insecurity now hanging over millions of people. Imagine if you, a loved one, or friend is dependent on a specific life-saving medication, and someone is threatening to take it away. That is exactly what we are doing right now to over twenty million people. All the good-will PEPFAR has created will vanish overnight without a clean five-year reauthorization.
9. Fungibility has been raised as a concern regarding the co-mingling or misuse of PEPFAR funding. The use of PEPFAR money is highly monitored and has strict reporting requirements. In fact, of all the government programs we have

participated in over the last thirty-five years it has easily the most stringent financial controls. Any misuse of PEPFAR funds would be immediately identified and would be followed up on by PEPFAR and State staff. Abortion is simply not a part of PEPFAR's mission and would stand out as a big red flag.

10. Lastly, abortion is unlikely to occur in PEPFAR focus countries since abortion is illegal in nearly all of them. Suggesting that some PEPFAR grantees or contractors might try to use any PEPFAR funding for abortion or the promotion of abortion is highly unlikely both because of local laws, the desire by most to have large families, and the tight oversight PEPFAR has on funding. Some of the groups put into question have multi-million-dollar awards and would be unlikely to jeopardize their entire awards by spending a few thousand dollars for any other purpose. It just doesn't make sense.

In closing, if you do believe PEPFAR is not worthy of a clean five-year reauthorization please talk to many of us who are pro-life and work mostly in the developing world. To the person they will explain the importance of the program, of a five-year reauthorization, and of the many lives you can help us save by supporting such a five-year reauthorization only. Thank you for your commitment to saving the lives of the unborn and join us in supporting the lives of their parents and grandparents as well.

Committed to protecting all life, Shepherd
CO-Founder, The Children's AIDS Fund International