

WASHINGTON, DC (December 21, 2011) – Today Rep. Jan Schakowsky and 11 House colleagues sent a letter to **the White House** **urging President Obama,** USAID and State Department to review the current interpretation of the Helms Amendment, which limits but does not prohibit abortion funding

▪

□

The letter encourages the Obama Administration to review the interpretation of the Helms Amendment to ensure that U.S. foreign assistance policies are responsive to the needs of women in developing countries. It states, “[w]e are concerned that improper implementation of current foreign assistance restrictions may be impeding our ability to provide even more effective and life-saving information and services.”

An overly restrictive interpretation of the Helms Amendment unnecessarily harms women and girls throughout the world – many of whom already suffer disproportionately from a lack of access to health care, poverty, and are at grave risk of sexual violence and trauma. Under the Helms Amendment, the U.S. can legally fund abortion services for non-family planning purposes, such as abortions for women whose lives would be threatened by continuing with a pregnancy, or women who are the victims of rape or incest.

“Every year 47,000 women die from unsafe abortion and millions more suffer serious injury. Our foreign assistance policies should respond to the needs of women in developing countries – not restrict their access to essential services

”

said Rep. Schakowsky

“

▪

Placing these overly restrictive limitations on foreign-assistance seriously impedes our ability to ensure that women whose lives are at risk, or women who are the victims of rape or incest have access to effective and life-saving information or counseling about all of their reproductive options – just like women in the United States. The Helms Amendment was not intended to be implemented as though it were an absolute ban.”

A copy of the letter can be found [here](#) .

###