HIV/AIDS and Access to Safe Abortion Services
A Response to Senator Graham’s Abortion Ban

On November 7, 2013, Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) introduced legislation that would ban all abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy unless a woman is a victim of rape or incest, or her life is in danger. The Women’s Collective (TWC) stands strongly against this legislation. This bill is the latest in a series of bills being introduced in both federal and state legislatures that are designed to restrict women’s rights to control their bodies, their health and their futures.

Access to family planning services has already been severely restricted throughout the United States. According to the Guttmacher Institute, in 2008, more than 4,000 women in the United States were denied abortion care because of limits on the provision of services after a certain point during the pregnancy. A similar study by the Guttmacher Institute found that in 2008, women in the United States had to travel an average of 30 miles to access abortion services. In states that had enacted abortion restrictions, such as mandatory counseling and/or waiting periods, and in rural areas with limited abortion providers, women were twice as likely to have to travel even greater distances.

This diminishing access to family planning and abortion services is particularly critical for women living with HIV/AIDS. Though women living with HIV/AIDS often seek abortions for the same reasons as other women, they face unique difficulties such as concerns about how pregnancy will impact their health and concerns about transmitting HIV during pregnancy. In addition, the majority of women living with HIV/AIDS are from marginalized communities which already face limitations on their access to reproductive health care and abortion services due to lack of access to funds, safe, affordable and adequate housing, transportation, or a safe and accessible health care provider. Women living with HIV/AIDS are also more likely to experience both sexual violence, which may result in an unwanted pregnancy, and domestic violence, which may prevent them from safely accessing family planning or reproductive health care services. For these women, access to safe abortion is crucial to preserve their right to choose when and how to become a mother. All women, and women living with HIV/AIDS in particular, should have the right to make informed reproductive choices.

The Women’s Collective stands against Senator Lindsey Graham’s bill which would ban abortion at 20 weeks. Access to family planning and safe abortion services is crucial to preserve the rights and dignity of all women, and, particularly, of women living with HIV/AIDS. The Women’s Collective urges Congress and state legislatures to support the rights of women to make informed reproductive choices and to control their bodies, their health and their futures.