

Capitol Hill Days 2017

From March 25th-27th, we attended Population Connection's Capitol Hill Days to advocate for international family planning funding and repeal of the Global Gag Rule. During the event, we learned the public health impacts of cuts to family planning funding and the reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule on global reproductive health, maternal and child health, and the environment. We spent three days developing our advocacy and lobbying skills. To open the event, we attended the 3rd annual "*Empower Her, Empower Humanity*" award ceremony, celebrating Congresswoman Barbara Lee and her advocacy and work on reproductive rights and family planning.

We attended a variety of workshops and discussions led by speakers including: Chloe Cooney, Director of Global Advocacy, Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA); Jessica Marcella, Vice President for Advocacy and Communications at the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association (NFPRHA); Meaghan Parker, Senior Writer/Editor for the Wilson Center, Environmental Change and Security Program; Dianah Wabwire, Program Manager

for the Conservation through Public Health (CTPH); and Teresa Omondi-Adeitan, Executive Director for the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA-Kenya). The speakers engaged the audience on topics such as environmental health, domestic and global family planning issues. We left the sessions feeling empowered to lobby for women's rights globally, and were reminded by Chloe Cooney that, "You only get what you fight for. And we've got to fight every step of the way."

Our last sessions prepared us for Capitol Hill with grassroots organizing, lobbying and advocacy workshops that provided us with the tools to become activists on the hill and in our respective communities. We ended the event with a powerful keynote speech from Jamila Perritt, MD, MPH, FACOG an Obstetrician and Gynecologist, reproductive health and family planning specialist and passionate advocate for reproductive health and rights.

On Monday, we took our skills to Capitol Hill. We met with the offices of U.S. Senator Bob Casey (PA), U.S. Senator Pat Toomey (PA),

U.S. Congressman Dwight Evans (2nd District PA), and U.S. Congressman Tom Marino (10th District PA). We expressed the importance of funding for global family planning, and the harmful outcomes of the Global Gag Rule, particularly for underserved and impoverished communities. We reiterated to our state representatives that family planning is crucial for improving preventive healthcare and maternal health, as well as protecting our national security and the environment.

In all, Capitol Hill Days served as a great opportunity for sharpening our advocacy skills on a pertinent issue affecting all populations on a global scale, and putting skills learned from our MPH program into practice.

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