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Opening Statement Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

Hearing on “HHS and the Catholic Church: Examining the Politicization of Grants”

December 1, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to take a moment to remind everyone of our ultimate goal here today—to help victims of human trafficking, forced prostitution, and sex slavery to escape their conditions and put their lives back together. These victims have survived horrifying abuses that few people in this room can imagine. These atrocities are despicable, almost unspeakable. But we cannot shy away from them. We must address them directly and give these victims a voice.

To conduct a responsible review of the process used to award these grants, we need to understand who these victims are, what they have gone through, and why they need reproductive health services. This is an extremely uncomfortable issue. We are talking about young women who have been raped, sometimes repeatedly, and often have contracted sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, many of them are coping with severe psychological trauma. If I may, I would like to ask unanimous consent to enter into the record three studies on this issue.

- First is the State Department’s 2011 report on Trafficking in Persons, which says this: “The United States is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor, debt bondage, document servitude, and sex trafficking.”
- Second is a study by researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which finds that 90% of trafficking victims report “having been physically forced or intimidated into sex or doing something sexual.”
- Third is a study by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, which reports that “[b]etween 244,000 and 325,000 American children and youth are at risk each year of becoming victims of sexual exploitation, including as victims of *commercial* sexual exploitation.”

To address these problems, HHS stated in its grant announcement that these funds are intended to provide “comprehensive case management” services that include referrals for “family planning services.”

To be clear, this is not about using federal funds for abortion. This is about providing referrals for a full range of contraception, family planning, and other reproductive health services. Applicants who were willing and able to provide these referrals got preference over those who were not.

Mr. Chairman, after you announced this hearing, I sent you a letter requesting additional witnesses. They are individuals who work for organizations that help these victims on a daily basis and advocate on their behalf. It would have taken the Committee very little time to hear from them today, and they would have provided a compelling case for why these services are so critical for these victims.

Unfortunately, you rejected my request. In your response letter, you said this type of testimony was not the subject of today's hearing. I strongly disagree. If our goal is to analyze these grants in a responsible manner, we cannot ignore the voices of these human trafficking victims, many of whom are very young women who have been exploited and raped by their persecutors.

For these reasons, today I am invoking my right as the Ranking Member to request a minority day of hearings under House Rule 11. I am submitting for the record the required letter with the appropriate number of signatures.

Mr. Chairman, you have scheduled no full Committee business for the entire next week. We have no full Committee hearings and no markups. Since our schedule is wide open, and since the witnesses are willing to appear, I respectfully request that you schedule our hearing then. Thank you.

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