

# **President Signs Omnibus Bill Including Major Civil Liberties Policy Advances For Washington, D.C.**

**Bill Lifts 20-Year Ban On DC Abortion Funding, Ends Discriminatory School Voucher Program And Defunds Abstinence-Only Sex Education Programs**

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WASHINGTON – President Obama today signed into law the Fiscal Year 2010 Omnibus Appropriations bill, legislation that includes several positive civil liberties provisions for the District of Columbia including removal of a ban on financial aid for low-income women to receive abortions, expanded benefits for domestic partnerships and an end to D.C.'s discriminatory school voucher program. The omnibus bill includes several major appropriations bills: Labor, Health and Human Services, Financial Services and State and Foreign Operations. The American Civil Liberties Union hailed the omnibus bill as a huge step forward for civil liberties in the District of Columbia.

The passage of the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill finally ends funding for the failed Community Based Abstinence Education program and instead directs significant resources into medically accurate, evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs. The Labor, Health and Human Services bill lifts a ban on federal funds for needle-exchange programs – which are crucial to public health and greatly reduce the spread of disease – across the country. The bill also legalizes the use of medical marijuana in D.C. by removing a federal ban on a referendum that was passed by an overwhelming majority of District voters in the 1990s.

“District of Columbia residents have a lot to be thankful for with the signing of this law,” said Michael Macleod-Ball, Acting Director of the ACLU Washington Legislative Office. “These significant and welcome changes to D.C. law will help to bring the District’s education program and drug and reproductive policies in line with the majority of the country and Constitution. We are especially encouraged to see Congress and the president reject abstinence-only education which censors information, promotes gender stereotypes, marginalizes gay and lesbian youth and jeopardizes the well-being of young people. We hope that the rest of the country will follow suit.”

The ACLU has long sought an end to the D.C. abortion ban, arguing that the District of Columbia ought to have the right, like other states, to use its own local, non-federal revenue to provide abortion care to its low-income residents. The ACLU has also made the elimination of abstinence-only-until-marriage funding a priority and was pleased to see the provision included in the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill. Unfortunately, another provision included in the FY2010 Omnibus Appropriations bill preserves other abortion bans and fails to codify the global gag rule rescission that was offered by Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and adopted by the Senate Appropriations Committee.

“District of Columbia residents and their elected representatives can finally decide how to meet the needs of poor women in their communities,” said Vania Leveille, ACLU Legislative Counsel. “For 20-years, non-resident members of Congress have imposed their own ideology, morality or religious beliefs on the District, utterly disregarding the rights and needs of the local

community. After more than a decade, Congress had put teenagers' health above politics and ideology with abstinence-only education. The federal government has an obligation to support programs that provide accurate, age-appropriate information that can protect teenagers' health and ability to achieve in school and beyond."

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