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Komen reverses decision, reinstates grants to Planned Parenthood

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Pro-life advocate Patricia Bankeser of St. Joseph Parish in Kings Park, N.Y., holds a placard near the entrance to a Planned Parenthood center in Smithtown, N.Y., Jan. 19. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

DALLAS -- The Feb. 3 decision by Susan G. Komen for the Cure to reinstate grants to Planned Parenthood affiliates for breast cancer screenings was the result of a "vicious attack" on the organization, said a pro-life leader.

Pro-life leaders hailed Komen's announcement Jan. 31 that it would no longer give grants to Planned Parenthood, but it sparked a maelstrom of negative reaction and an online petition asking the group to reverse its decision.

"I am troubled that the Komen foundation has come under such heavy fire for their recent decision to tighten and focus their funding guidelines," said Charmaine Yoest, president and CEO of Americans United for Life.

"This week we have all been witness to highly partisan attacks from pro-abortion advocates and an ugly and disgraceful shakedown that highlights Planned Parenthood's willingness to pursue a scorched-earth strategy to force compliance with their pro-abortion agenda," she said in a statement.

Yoest also noted that Komen donors are "now confused about their association with the nation's largest abortion provider."

A statement from Komen's founder and CEO Nancy Brinker posted on the Dallas-based organization's website Feb. 3 apologized to the American public "for recent decisions that cast doubt upon our commitment to our mission of saving women's lives."

Brinker said the reaction to the decision to discontinue the funding was "deeply unsettling for our supporters, partners and friends and all of us at Susan G. Komen. We have been distressed at the presumption that the changes made to our funding criteria were done for political reasons or to specifically penalize Planned Parenthood. They were not."

She also noted that Komen had planned to stop funding grant applications made by organizations under investigation but that it will "amend the criteria to make clear that disqualifying investigations must be criminal and conclusive in nature and not political."

Planned Parenthood is currently the focus of an investigation by U.S. Rep. Cliff Stearns, R-Fla., to see whether the organization used federal funds to pay for abortions, which would be illegal. Stearns is chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

Komen raises millions annually for the detection, treatment and research of breast cancer. One of its signature events is the annual Race for the Cure held in communities around the country. Planned Parenthood, which provides abortions, also offers free breast exams and mammograms, considered key to early detection of breast cancer. The Komen foundation over the years has said that it intended its contributions go toward these exams but could not control how funds were allocated at Planned Parenthood.

Leslie Aun, a spokeswoman for Komen, told The Associated Press Feb. 1 that the organization's decision to end its relationship with Planned Parenthood was based on a new policy that says grants cannot be given to organizations that are being investigated by government authorities, whether it is at the state, local or federal level.

In the new statement, Brinker said the group's goal in the grant process "is to support women and families in the fight against breast cancer. Amending our criteria will ensure that politics has no place in our grant process. We will continue to fund existing grants, including those of Planned Parenthood, and preserve their eligibility to apply for future grants, while maintaining the ability of our affiliates to make funding decisions that meet the needs of their communities."

She also added that the organization hopes everyone involved will be able "to pause, slow down and reflect on how grants can most effectively and directly be administered without controversies that hurt the cause of women. We urge everyone who has participated in this conversation across the country over the last few days to help us move past this issue. We do not want our mission marred or affected by politics -- anyone's politics."

In a letter to Congress last April urging lawmakers to exclude from the federal budget any funding for Planned Parenthood or its affiliates, Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston called the federation "by far the largest provider and promoter of abortions nationwide."

The cardinal, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, said that Planned Parenthood also has opposed "any meaningful limits on abortion, including modest measures such as public funding bans, informed consent provisions and parental notice requirements on unemancipated minors."

In recent years, the St. Louis Archdiocese and several other U.S. dioceses have asked Catholic groups to suspend support for Komen, citing its contributions to Planned Parenthood and the fact the foundation does not exclude the possibility of funding research that uses embryonic stem cells.

Last April, the Archdiocese of St. Louis reissued one of its previous policy statements on the Komen foundation: "Due to its policy allowing affiliates to offer financial support to abortion-providing facilities, its denial of studies showing abortion as a cause of breast cancer, and its endorsement of embryonic stem-cell research, the Respect Life Apostolate neither supports nor encourages participation in activities that benefit Susan G. Komen for the Cure."

Last July, Bishop Leonard P. Blair of Toledo, Ohio, told Catholic institutions and schools in that diocese to suspend fundraising efforts for Komen and instead direct such donations to a local group of Catholic-run cancer centers.

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