

*Issa Rejects Witness Testimony About Need for Family Planning Referrals for Rape Victims*

Washington, DC (Dec. 1, 2011)—At a Committee hearing today on grants to assist human trafficking victims, Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings expressed disappointment with Chairman Darrell Issa’s decision to refuse testimony from witnesses who would have addressed the critical need for family planning referral services for victims of forced prostitution and sexual exploitation.

At the hearing, entitled “HHS and the Catholic Church: Examining the Politicization of Grants,” Issa focused on the decision by the Department of Health and Human Services not to award a grant to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops under the National Human Trafficking Victim Assistance Program because it refused to make referrals for contraceptives and other reproductive health services.

“If our goal is to analyze these grants in a responsible manner,” Cummings [said in a statement](#), “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.”

On November 29, 2011, [Cummings sent a letter to Issa](#) requesting testimony from two witnesses to “discuss their experiences working with trafficking victims and the need for a full range of services under the National Human Trafficking Victim Assistance Program.” Cummings requested testimony from Dr. Susie Baldwin, the Medical Director for the California Family Health Council, and Andrea Powell, the Executive Director and Co-Founder of FAIR Girls in Washington DC.

In a response on November 30, 2011, Issa rejected Cummings’ request, stating that testimony from these witnesses was not the subject of the hearing. Cummings took issue with Issa’s response, stating:

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.

Cummings and 10 other Committee Democrats [submitted a letter at the hearing](#) formally invoking a House Rule XI, which requires the Committee to hold a minority day of hearings with a panel of witnesses called by the minority. They requested that the hearing be held next week since the full Committee has no hearings, markups, or other business scheduled.