

February 3, 2011

Honorable Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I write to you out of deep concern that abortion statistics published annually by your agency have not yet been released this year.

For the last 42 years, your agency, through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has collected and published data on legal abortions. The results are routinely published in late November. CDC has not yet published this year's report, and even more troubling are reports I have heard that the information is going to be withheld indefinitely.

If these reports are accurate, I hope the decision was not made for political reasons. As you know, CDC collects this information for important public health reasons. According to last year's report, "Ongoing national surveillance of abortion is useful for multiple reasons. Ongoing abortion surveillance is needed to guide and evaluate programs aimed at preventing unintended pregnancies.... In addition, routine national surveillance of abortion is needed to assess changes in clinical practice patterns." The report also tracks abortion-related mortalities, an important statistic for any major medical procedure.

Most Americans – regardless of their view on abortion – share the goal of reducing abortions. These statistics play an important role in determining whether our public and private efforts are effective. As long as abortion is legal in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention should continue to provide doctors, health care providers, policymakers, and individuals with standard public health information. It is my sincere hope that the CDC does not intend to abdicate this most basic public health role.

I would respectfully request a response to this letter detailing your agency's future plans regarding the Abortion Surveillance System. If your agency does not intend to collect or publish this data now and in the future, I would also request a detailed explanation as to why the agency has reversed its position on the public health benefits of abortion surveillance and all internal documents discussing this topic, including emails and memoranda.

We cannot accomplish our shared goal of making abortion rare if we do not even know how many abortions are occurring. Simply ignoring or covering up the extent of abortion in America will not make the tragedy go away.

Sincerely,



Tom Coburn, M.D.
United States Senator