

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 30, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write to urge the State Department to take swift action to address the devastating impact of the Ebola outbreak in eastern Africa on women and infants by utilizing funding provided by Congress for voluntary family planning programming, to distribute already purchased family planning commodities and supporting the UN Population Fund's (UNFPA) health clinics in the region.

Ebola during pregnancy is catastrophic, with a nearly 100 percent fetal loss rate and catastrophic material mortality risk due to severe hemorrhaging. By providing women with the option to voluntarily prevent unplanned pregnancies and to protect themselves from transmission of the virus and have access to clinics, the United States can prevent further deaths of women and the cruel and certain death of any fetus exposed to the virus.

During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa from 2014-2016, maternal mortality rose an estimated 75%. The staggering increase in maternal mortality was a result of the Ebola virus, as well as pregnant women forgoing antenatal and attended delivery care because of fear of contracting the virus at health clinics. Currently, conflict and displacement are exacerbating the Ebola outbreak with spikes in gender-based and sexual violence in Ituri and North Kivu, as well as an increase in transactional and survival sex. Access to voluntary family planning counseling and supplies is critical to protect the lives of women and babies and to control the spread of the virus.

The inclusion of family planning in the U.S. response to the Ebola virus, including condoms and hormonal contraceptive methods, post-rape care and lifesaving anti-hemorrhage maternal health medicines is paramount. Congress, on a bipartisan basis, supports voluntary family planning programs because such programs support families and reduce maternal and infant death rates. In East Africa right now, access to family planning is essential to protecting women and babies and to reducing viral transmission. We urge you to utilize the \$608 million in international family planning funding included in the Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations bill and to distribute the remaining \$1.7 million in already purchased family planning commodities in storage in Geel, Belgium which we understand will otherwise be destroyed.

We also ask that you issue a humanitarian exemption to support UNFPA's sexual and reproductive health programming in affected areas. UNFPA is already operational across 29 health zones in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Uganda; emergency contributions

would be deployed immediately through an existing, proven delivery system with no ramp-up delay. Providing sexual and reproductive health support to women is not a parallel track alongside the Ebola response: it is the Ebola response for the 642,000 women of reproductive age - including an estimated 37,820 pregnant women - in the affected areas.

The rapid spread of the virus, with more than 2,000 confirmed cases and 796 confirmed deaths as of this week in the DRC, leaves no time for delay in providing all possible interventions to save lives and prevent the transmission of the virus. The cost of United States response is approaching \$1 billion. Investment now in voluntary family planning is fiscally rational in addition to being morally urgent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jeanne Shaheen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeanne" and last name "Shaheen" clearly distinguishable.

Jeanne Shaheen
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Lisa Murkowski". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" and last name "Murkowski" clearly distinguishable.

Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senator