

Statement opposing sex selection bill (HR3541, "PRENDA")

For Immediate Release  
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**Statement of Generations Ahead Executive Director Sujatha Jesudason  
on HR 3541, the "Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass  
Prenatal Nondiscrimination Act (PRENDA) of 2011."**

Generations Ahead is unique among pro-choice and reproductive health organizations in working to *discourage* son preference and sex selective practices while *protecting* reproductive autonomy, including access to comprehensive health care and abortion.

Many people are uncomfortable with the idea of abortion for sex selection, and the underlying assumptions that might lead to valuing a child more because of his or her sex. But current cynical and hypocritical efforts by anti-choice forces to ban abortions create insidious new obstacles to reproductive healthcare. Bills like "PRENDA" do not in any way address the serious and complex concerns raised by the practice of sex selection or racial health disparities.

Instead, anti-choice groups are just trying a new ploy -- one that uses the rhetoric of equality and rights, -- to promote their agenda. This bill means just one thing for every woman: the highest and most intrusive of scrutiny of the reason she seeks an abortion. It is clear that African-American and Asian American women in particular will face intrusive questions from providers if this proposal becomes law.

"Restricting women's rights and questioning their decision-making is an utterly misguided approach to promoting gender equality", said Sujatha Jesudason, Executive Director, Generations Ahead. "Our real challenge is to change the context in which sex selection occurs, and address gender and racial equality issues while protecting the right of all women to make the best reproductive decisions for themselves and their families."

Generations Ahead believes the use of sex selective technologies reflects stereotypes that limit human potential, reinforcing unfortunate social and cultural norms. Changing attitudes and behaviors related to sex selection begins with encouraging prospective parents to question their own expectations of boys and girls.

Recent Generations Ahead research with South Asian American community members in the San Francisco Bay area found that participants are concerned about the social and cultural practices of son preference and norms regarding gender inequality in their community, but were opposed to legal restrictions as a solution. As one woman succinctly put it: "You cannot restrict women's autonomy -- dealing with sex selection issues is through community education not legal restraint."

The research found that preference for sons is not the same as actually pursuing sex selection, and few research participants reported knowing of cases of sex selection using abortion or other reproductive technology. Nor did most of the research participants want to see legal restrictions. They firmly believed that the way to address the problem was to change social and cultural norms through community education and discussions. Restricting access to the different sex selective practices would not resolve the social and cultural roots of the practice.

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Generations Ahead works with reproductive health, rights and justice organizations to ensure women's reproductive health care access, particularly for low-income women and women of color. In addition, we work to discourage son preference norms that lead to sex selective practices through partnerships and engagement with South Asian American and Asian American community groups as well as health care providers, including fertility doctors.