

SWEDEN ACCUSED OF LIBERIAN ABORTION LAW INTERFERENCE

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"We know that other countries are putting pressure on Liberia ... to see 40,000 Liberian children a year

killed."—U.S. Rep. Chris Smith

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The Swedish embassy in Liberia has denied involvement in a bribery scandal relating to efforts to legalize abortion in that country. The Liberian government's attempt to force abortion legislation through the Senate is rife with corruption, including the bribing of legislators in exchange for favorable votes, according to multiple highly placed sources in Liberia.

Abortion is currently illegal in Liberia except in cases of rape, incest, fetal abnormality, or risk to the woman's physical or mental health, with certification from two physicians required to confirm exceptions. In 2022, the Liberian House of Representatives passed the Public Health Bill, which would legalize abortion on demand for any reason up to 14 weeks gestation. That bill is now before the Liberian Senate, and the Ministry of Health is pushing hard for its passage before President-elect Joseph Nyumah Boakai takes power in January 2024.

As the crucial vote nears, claims of foreign interference have intensified, including that "the Swedish Embassy had made substantial financial contributions to senators in exchange for their support of legalizing abortion under the guise of funding various development projects in Liberia," according to the [Daily Observer](#).

According to [Stop Abortion Liberia](#), a site run by Bishop Kortu K. Brown, the president of the Liberian Council of Churches:

The Swedish government and other NGOs have been creating and funding organizations in Liberia (particularly the Amplifying Rights Network) to lobby for the legalization of abortion. Foreign government interference in the democratic

process of Liberia is totally unacceptable and a form of colonialism you must reject.

Bishop Brown was referring to the Swedish embassy's financial support for the [Amplifying Rights Network](#), a coalition of ten civil society organizations, which is aggressively campaigning for legal abortion.

U.S. Congressman Chris Smith, addressing the pressure on Liberians to legalize abortion, said in a [statement](#) last week:

There is a powerful and well-funded global agenda that aggressively denies, devalues, and disrespects unborn baby girls and boys and trivializes the harm suffered by women who procure abortion on demand.

We know that other countries are putting pressure on Liberia, and allegedly even paying your politicians bribes, to see 40,000 Liberian children a year killed. As others have said, your children are worth more than 30 pieces of silver.

In response to earlier claims of bribery and foreign interference, Swedish ambassador Urban Sjöström [told](#) the *Daily Observer*, "Yes, Sweden supports the decriminalization of abortion, as recommended in WHO's 2022 Abortion Care Guideline, which recommends the full decriminalization of abortion." However, in response to the claims of direct bribes to Liberian senators, Sjöström called the accusations "completely false." "We do not give nor accept bribes," he said.

Corroborating the bribery allegations, one source recounted personally witnessing two phone conversations where sitting legislators acknowledged receiving “thick envelopes” of bribe money and a third phone call in which a member of senior senate leadership acknowledged, while chuckling, that senators were also given bribe money.

“Reliable sources in the Ministry of Health as well as in the Senate confirm that over \$400,000 was given to the lead consultant to lobby the passage [of the abortion law],” another source with intimate knowledge of the proceedings said, referring to Peter Sonpon Coleman, the lead consultant.

“Dr. Peter Sonpon Coleman, former Minister of Health in Charles Taylor’s government and former senator in George Weah government received that amount.”

Another key source, who requested anonymity for safety reasons, also alleged that the process has been tainted by corruption. “Our sources at the Ministry of Health and the legislature confirm that 28 out of the 30 senators received bribes to the tune of \$10,000 each to pass into law the abortion and sexual rights bill in the senate,” the source stated. “The bribery was carried out by former senator Dr. Peter Coleman with assistance from the Minister of Health.”

A senator who wished to remain anonymous also affirmed his knowledge of bribery taking place during the legislative process.

Proponents of the abortion legislation have moved up the voting timeline, hoping to pass the law by this Thursday.

This story is developing.