
BILL NO: House Bill 937
TITLE: Abortion Care Access Act
COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations
HEARING DATE: February 22, 2022
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. While our direct representation projects are limited to primarily survivors of domestic violence, our advocacy is in support of gender justice as a whole, because all women are entitled to access to justice, equality, and autonomy. We recognize that all the issues we fight for are interconnected. Women cannot have bodily autonomy unless they have physical safety. They cannot have physical safety without economic security. And they cannot have economic security without bodily autonomy.

We wholeheartedly support HB 937, and its companion bill HB 952, as they aim to increase access to abortion care services and remove barriers to insurance coverage for abortion care. Both steps are critical to ensuring women in Maryland not only have a right to an abortion, but also have meaningful access to one when and where they need one. Abortion access should not be dependent on zip code or insurance status.

In 1992 Maryland voters approved a ballot question that led to a statutory right to an abortion. At the time of codification, the intent was to guarantee that the state would not interfere with a woman's right to an abortion, but it did not contemplate the myriad of ways the delivery of health care services, including abortion care would change in the coming decades. HB 937 focuses specifically on updating our outdated laws to reflect the recommendations of the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists, by allowing nurse practitioners, nurse-midwives, licensed midwives, and physician assistants to also provide abortion care, as they already do in 14 other states. This is particularly critical right now as states are seeing an increased demand for abortions as access is restricted in neighboring regions. Even within Maryland, most abortion providers are located in the greater Baltimore and DC metropolitan area, and two-thirds of counties in Maryland do not have a single abortion provider. It would further support practitioners' needs for on-going training in abortion care which is becoming increasingly more difficult to provide as restrictions continue to grow nationwide.

Similarly, HB 952 increases access to abortion care for women utilizing both private insurance and Medicaid, by removing obstacles such as deductible requirements, co-payments, or cost-sharing provisions, and would require insurers provide information to consumers regarding their coverage. This will likewise ensure that women would have meaningful access to abortion care, without financial or geographic barriers.

Access to reproductive health care, including and especially abortion care, is a critical component for both physical safety and economic security. Women who are victims of intimate partner violence are generally more likely to have unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions¹. According to the 2010

¹The Effects of Violence on Women's Reproductive Health, The Population Reference Bureau, 2011, <https://www.prb.org/resources/the-effects-of-violence-on-womens-reproductive-health-fact-sheet/>

National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, an estimated two million women in the United States have become pregnant as a result of rape by an intimate partner and at least 7% of women seeking abortions are also victims of intimate partner violence.² At the same time, studies have proven that abortion access has a positive impact on women's economic positions, increasing their participation in the workforce overall. In fact, the benefits carry on through generations, with studies finding that children born to women with abortion access had lower rates of poverty and receipt of public assistance during childhood, primarily due to a reduction in living with single parents, and were more likely to graduate college, and were less likely to be single parents or receive public assistance as adults.

The Women's Law Center strongly believes that reproductive choice is essential for the health and well-being of women in Maryland. But the right to reproductive choice is meaningless without full access. For these reasons, the Women's Law Center urges a favorable report on House Bill 937.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.

² *Understanding Intimate Partner Violence as a Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Issue in the United States*, The Guttmacher Institute, Kinsey Hasstedt and Andrea Rowan, 2016, <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2016/07/understanding-intimate-partner-violence-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-issue>