

Testimony of the Human Trafficking Prevention Project

BILL NO: House Bill 937
TITLE: Abortion Care Access Act
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 22, 2022
POSITION: FAVORABLE

House Bill 937 would establish both the Abortion Care Clinical Training Program and the Abortion Care Clinical Training Program Fund in order to ensure that Maryland has medical providers skilled at providing abortion care located throughout the State of Maryland. The Human Trafficking Prevention Project at the University of Baltimore School of Law supports this bill because it will provide improved access to abortion care throughout the state, regardless of zip code, for all child-bearing individuals. For human trafficking survivors, it will improve their ability to access a type of medical care which is often so critically intertwined with their victimization, control over which is essential to their healing process.

In 1991, the Maryland General Assembly codified the legal right to abortion, as provided by *Roe v. Wade*. Senate Bill 162 became a ballot measure and went into effect after Marylanders overwhelmingly supported the measure with 62% of the vote. Support for abortion care is even greater today. In a 2021 poll, 72% of Marylanders oppose overturning *Roe* and 79% support ensuring individuals have access to the full range of reproductive health care services. Despite this, two-thirds of Maryland counties do not have abortion providers, as Maryland's current outdated law only allows physicians to provide abortion care, despite the fact that other pregnancy care is routinely provided by nurse practitioners, nurse-midwives, licensed midwives, and physician assistants. This restricted access to care only further debilitates those most affected by the economic, racial, and gender divides rampant in this country. Abortion bans and barriers to abortion care disproportionately harm minorities, child-bearing individuals, and people of color.¹ House Bill 937 is a critical step towards broad range access to reproductive health care services and a more equitable healthcare system.

The need for more comprehensive reproductive services is even more dire for victims of human trafficking, given that high-risk sexual activity and sexual violence is such a common part of their victimization, especially among survivors of sex trafficking. In a survey of sex trafficking victims, 7 out of 10 respondents said they had at least one pregnancy while trafficked, while one-fifth of respondents reported five or more pregnancies.² Increasing the number of service providers and expanding health insurance coverage would allow these victims to seek a full range of options for reproductive healthcare, regardless of where they are located in the state. Further, unrestrained access to reproductive healthcare may help identify victims of trafficking, given that approximately 88% of human trafficking victims access health care during their trafficking situation.³ Pregnancy, miscarriage, and abortion are experienced by half or more of survivors either during or after trafficking.⁴ Healthcare providers who specialize in abortion and reproductive care are therefore particularly likely to have opportunities for identification and intervention. Lastly, while all people who can bear children deserve compassion and support,

¹ M. Antonia Biggs, et. al., *Understanding Why Women Seek Abortions in the US* (2013), <https://bmcwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/1472-6874-13-29.pdf>.

² Laura J. Lederer & Christopher A. Wetzel, *The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare Facilities* (2014), <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/The-Health-Consequences-of-Sex-Trafficking%20-.pdf>.

³ See generally Brittany Anthony, et. al., *On-Ramps, Intersections, and Exit Routes: A Roadmap for Systems and Industries to Prevent and Disrupt Human Trafficking* (July 2018), <https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Roadmap-for-Systems-and-Industries-to-Prevent-and-Disrupt-Human-Trafficking-Health-Care.pdf>.

⁴ See Lederer & Wetzel, *supra* note 2.

instead of barriers, condemnation, and shame, for trafficking survivors this can be a crucial part of their healing, as restoring control and choice is integral to the process of recovering from trauma.

House Bill 937 will ensure that Maryland has enough abortion providers, thereby improving the health outcomes of all persons who seek reproductive health services, regardless of location. For trafficking survivors, improved access to these services could help providers identify victims as well as support survivors as they work to heal from the trauma of their trafficking experience. For these reasons, as well as the reasons supplied by our colleagues in the reproductive health field, the Human Trafficking Prevention Project at the University of Baltimore School of Law supports House Bill 937. We respectfully urge a favorable report.