

Committees: Appropriations

Testimony on: HB477

Position: Favorable

10 February 2023

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and the members of the Appropriations Committee,

The University of Maryland, Student Government Association supports HB477 in requiring public higher education institutions, with assistance (when requested) from the Maryland Department of Health, to consult students in order to develop a reproductive health services plan. This bill is significant because it ensures health access for Maryland's college students.

My name is Isha Yardi and I'm the Student Government Association Director of Health and Wellness at the University of Maryland. I've also been a member of the Student Health Advisory Committee at our University's Health Center since 2020, and have worked extensively over the past year with our health center's Sexual Health Promotion and Wellness Services unit on our Free Emergency Contraceptive, E.C., pilot program. In Spring of 2021, our student government committed \$16,000 to a Free E.C. pilot program, which gave students access to free Plan B upon request from the health center pharmacy and dining services over a two-year period. Since the program's soft launch, over 5500 units of Plan B have been distributed to students across campus. Student Government has since committed another \$4,000 to continue this program through this Spring. The success of this program demonstrates an urgent need for universities to invest in the reproductive health of their students. But it also shows how accessible reproductive resources should be inextricably linked to the robust physical health services universities already provide their student body. This should go well beyond Plan B, which is used as a time-sensitive medication, to include other forms of preventative reproductive care including birth control and referrals to outside providers.

The timing of HB477 is also an important consideration. Last June, *Roe v. Wade* was overturned by the Supreme Court, effectively granting states jurisdiction over regulating abortion policy. This has significant implications not only for abortion access, but also for general access to broad reproductive care. Since the landmark decision, our Health Center has seen the prices of Plan B almost double, and price forecasting for emergency contraceptives continues to be incredibly unpredictable. This, coupled with a national increase in demand for birth control, makes HB477 of critical importance to universities and their students. University Health Centers are crucial pillars of knowledge and support for students, many of whom are living away from home for the first time. They should be committed to providing comprehensive reproductive healthcare, which is integral to the holistic well-being of many students on campus.

I respectfully request a favorable vote on HB477.

Thank you,



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