

Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Bill number: SB 527 - Community Colleges - Contraception - Access Requirements

Hearing Date: February 14, 2024

Position: Support

The Women's Law Center of Maryland (WLC) supports *SB 527 - Community Colleges - Contraception - Access Requirements*. The bill will require each community college, in consultation with students and student organizations, to develop and implement a plan to provide students with access to over-the-counter (OTC) contraception during class hours.

Last year, the Maryland General Assembly enacted legislation requiring access to OTC contraception on public four-year college campuses. This legislation was the result of advocacy from students who shared that access to contraception on some campuses was limited. We are appreciative that the Maryland General Assembly and the higher education community listened to students about their reproductive health needs.

This year's legislation focuses on contraceptive access on community college campuses. We think this legislation is critical because community college students tend to be older and face more challenges in balancing competing priorities between classes and commitments to work and family. While community colleges may not have on campus health centers, there are a growing number of OTC contraceptive options. This past summer, the Food and Drug Administration approved the first OTC birth control pill after a unanimous recommendation of an advisory committee of clinical and research experts.

Community colleges can provide access to OTC contraception through a number of means, although vending machines may be the best option. A growing number of campuses across the country have installed wellness vending machines that sell low-cost options for OTC birth control, menstrual hygiene products, and OTC medication commonly, such as ibuprofen, commonly needed by students.

Improved access to contraception supports educational success, and also addresses systemic inequality since the people who are most at risk for dropping out of college —low-income Americans and racial minorities—are also the ones who are most likely to unexpectedly become pregnant at an early age.

Because access to contraception is essential for the health, well-being, and success of college students, the WLC urges a favorable report on this bill. If we can provide any further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net or (443) 926-3443.

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