

Testimony in Support of Reproductive Health Care Clinic Security Grant Program

As a member of the Washington Area Clinic Defense Task Force and active clinic escort at the Planned Parenthood in Downtown Baltimore, I am writing in support of the Reproductive Health Care Clinic Security Grant Program. Funding for greater security at clinics across the state is of vital importance. Being physically present at clinics can be very dangerous and anxiety-inducing for patients, escorts, and staff members. At our clinic alone, anti-choice protestors (antis as we call them) have followed patients and providers to their vehicles, taken photos of license plates, verbally abused patients, staff, and volunteers, and become very physically aggressive. Police are frequently called, which further disrupts the ability of patients to access vital healthcare services including abortions, STI screenings, gender-affirming care, and HIV services. The very presence of antis intimidates and scares patients away from seeking services that they have the legal right to pursue.

As all clinic escorts are unpaid volunteers, we sometimes have a hard time getting coverage. When there is a shift that we can't get more than one escort to sign up for, we have to cancel the shift as it is not safe for us to escort alone. Our clinic specifically needs escort coverage on weekday afternoons. This significantly reduces the number of people who are available to volunteer due to work, school, and family obligations. Without adequate escort coverage, patients are left to fend for themselves against the antis who intentionally harass and frighten them, including passing out misinformation leaflets in an attempt to control their reproductive healthcare decisions. While the security team at our clinic is very dedicated and diligent, they are overwhelmed with needing to constantly provide surveillance and they are not able to provide the level of security needed.

The landscape of each clinic throughout the state varies greatly. For example, the clinic I escort at in Downtown Baltimore has a public sidewalk in front of it. This significantly impedes our ability to add physical barriers in front of the doors to block antis as all individuals have a right to demonstrate on a public sidewalk. Other clinics are located in stand-alone buildings, shopping centers, and office buildings. Clinics across the state can be found in rural, suburban, and urban areas and each environment presents its own set of security challenges. Due to vast differences in the logistics of each clinic, I would

encourage the grant program to allow for discretionary allocation of funds. This would provide clinic representatives with the opportunity to make their own decisions regarding how the funds could be best used. These budgetary determinations can be made based on their extensive experience and expert knowledge of the unique needs of their respective clinics.

Harassment and violence against abortion providers and clinics, including “assaults, burglaries, and clinic invasions,” continues to persist post-Dobbs according to the National Abortion Federation. NPR reports that eleven individuals have been killed in attacks on abortion providers and clinics since 1993. As abortion grows increasingly restricted across the country, Maryland will continue to receive an influx of patients from other states seeking reproductive healthcare. After the fall of Roe, two new independent abortion clinics have opened in Maryland. With the increase in patient traffic and number of clinics operating in the state, the need to provide funding for additional security has also increased. The FACE Act does not go far enough. We need your help to protect the right to bodily autonomy for all across the state.

As a Licensed Graduate Professional Counselor working in community mental health, I have often agonized over my inability to do more for my clients in need. You have been presented with the rare opportunity to offer aid to individuals who may be at the most vulnerable point in their lives. Please do not neglect the chance to do so.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly Marx". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kelly Marx, LGPC

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