



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

HB 691: Legally Protected Health Care- Gender-Affirming Treatment

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda Kohn, President

DATE: February 21, 2024

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. The League believes that everyone should have access to affordable, quality healthcare. The League believes that health care professionals and their patients should make decisions about treatment without interference from the government.

Gender-affirming care is recognized as medically necessary by every major medical association including the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Despite this accepted, necessary and life-saving treatment, 22 states passed laws banning gender-affirming care. These bans often include provisions that allow civil actions and criminal prosecution of state residents who seek or obtain gender-affirming care in a different state, as well as the out-of-state providers and people who assist patients to obtain that care. Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio have passed such laws.

After the Supreme Court overruled *Roe v. Wade*, many states passed similar statutes banning or impermissibly restricting a person's ability to obtain reproductive care. In response, in 2023, the Maryland General Assembly passed the Reproductive Health Protection Act (HB 808/ SB 859) which protects patients, health care providers and those assisting patients from such litigation.

Specifically, the Reproductive Health Protection Act shields individuals from extradition, prohibits Maryland agencies and law enforcement from assisting out of state investigations of people who access, provide, or assist people to obtain reproductive care that is legal in Maryland, and prohibits licensing boards from investigating Maryland licensees and certificate holders solely because they provide legally-permitted reproductive care.

Senate Bill 119 would simply add gender-affirming healthcare to the definition of "legally protected health care" and give the same protection to those who provide, seek, or assist patients to obtain gender-affirming care that is legal in Maryland.

No one should be denied access to health care. Senate Bill 119 ensures that patients have access to and can obtain gender-affirming care. For these reasons the League of Women Voters Maryland, which represents more than 1,500 concerned citizens throughout Maryland, strongly urges a favorable report on HB 691.