

## Pro-Choice Maryland Action

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### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1412: Abortion Care Access Grant Program and Fund – Establishment

TO: Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Pro-Choice Maryland Action

DATE: March 8, 2024

Pro-Choice Maryland Action 501(c)(4) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates for policies that protect reproductive freedom and that advance reproductive justice, including support and services for those who have children. Pro-Choice Maryland Action **supports House Bill 1412 with amendments as an important support for abortion providers and patients.**

In the aftermath of *Dobbs*, anti-choice advocates have been successful in drastically reducing or eliminating access to abortion and other reproductive health care in many states, particularly in the Southeast. In Maryland we are rising to meet the challenge of providing access to sexual and reproductive health care to not only our own citizens, but people coming from all over the country. Just as people come here from all over seeking abortion care, so too are anti-choice advocates focusing their efforts here as they work to eliminate abortion access elsewhere. All people seeking sexual and reproductive health services deserve the dignity of safe passage into our health care facilities. At present, Maryland law prohibits the obstruction of clinic entrances, but does not provide any sort of affirmative support for security measures at clinics.

Unfortunately, the need for increased security measures at reproductive health care clinics has never been more apparent. In 2022, abortion providers in states protective of abortion rights reported a 29% increase in assault and batteries, a 100% increase in burglaries, a 913% increase in stalking, and a 133% increase in bomb threats as compared to 2021.<sup>1</sup> And in 2021, abortion providers overall reported a 600% increase in stalking, a 450% increase in blockades, a 13% increase in hoax devices or suspicious packages, a 129% increase in invasions, and a 128% increase in assault and battery as compared to 2020.<sup>2</sup> These staggering figures are borne out by the experiences of our clinic partners, who are under constant threat simply for providing health care services that are protected under Maryland law.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://prochoice.org/our-work/provider-security/2022-naf-violence-disruption/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://prochoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021\\_NAF\\_VD\\_Stats\\_Final.pdf](https://prochoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021_NAF_VD_Stats_Final.pdf)

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House Bill 1412 will create a grant program for abortion providers through the Maryland Department of Health. Clinics will be able to use these funds to meet their specific needs, which may vary depending on the location and physical characteristics of each clinic. The grants will be funded through funds already set aside by health insurers due to the federal Affordable Care Act. The ACA mandates that each health insurer offering a plan that covers abortion services charge each subscriber a separate \$12 premium for this coverage. Under the ACA, the insurer must hold these funds in a separate account. Since the amount collected in funds far exceeds the cost of claims paid by insurers for abortion services, there is a remainder of funds available for the grants contemplated by HB 1412.

While Pro-Choice Maryland is supportive of HB 1412 generally, our clinic partners have reported concerns with § 13–5202(C)(2)(I), as this section states that clinics may use funds to collaborate with federal, state, and/or local law enforcement on security procedures. Specifically, they have found that law enforcement typically is not supportive of the clinic’s purpose and they have not been able to rely on law enforcement in the past when there is an incident at a clinic. Additionally, our clinic partners want communities of color to feel safe and welcome, and the presence of law enforcement would detract from this goal. Although we understand that the language in § 13–5202(C)(2)(I) is discretionary, we at Pro-Choice Maryland Action want to keep communication with providers clear and would therefore suggest an amendment to omit this language.

For the aforementioned reasons, **we urge a favorable report with amendments on Senate Bill 947.**