
Planned Parenthood of Maryland

February 19, 2024

The Honorable Joseline Peña-Melnyk
Chair, House Health & Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
6 Bladen St
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Peña-Melnyk:

My name is Tica Torres, Patient Access Program Manager at Planned Parenthood of Maryland (PPM). I am writing in favor of House Bill 691 - Legally Protected Health Care - Gender-Affirming Treatment. This bill will protect patients, their support networks, and providers of gender affirming care from out-of-state criminal or civil liability.

I have been coordinating care for Transgender and non-binary people in Maryland since 2017, and was on the ground floor of PPM launching its gender affirming hormone therapy program in 2020. As part of the service, PPM also created a care coordination program aiding patients in navigating their Transition process. Currently, I manage a team of three that connects our patients with the care they need to live happy and healthy lives. Since August 2023, PPM has provided 52 letters of support for surgeries and legal document changes.

We have the unique opportunity at PPM to serve folks from all parts of Maryland using our telehealth platform. This means we see folks from rural areas to urban cities. My team travels to all our 7 health centers regularly to learn about the needs in each region. We have found that regardless of where in the state the patient is seeking care, it is difficult to find health care providers with training in Gender affirming services and practices.

As a trans man myself, I have faced barriers to my treatment and have felt dehumanized by non-affirming experiences at the doctor's office. PPM's Patient Access program offers connections to other providers that share our values. The perfect example of this is a patient who was having trouble sticking to therapy appointments. After my department referred this patient to a therapist who identifies as queer and transgender, they've been able to stick with appointments more regularly.

Planned Parenthood of Maryland

I recently spoke to another patient that mentioned how much better his life is after transitioning. This patient was very timid and had difficulty interacting with people. He was struggling to be engaged at school, had very few friends, and was very withdrawn from his family. The confidence he now has in himself, and his appearance, has allowed him to be more outgoing. He is now in his 2nd year of college and thriving.

These experiences reflect my own. Since beginning my transition, I have addressed my anxiety disorder, strengthened relationships with my family, and shared joy—true joy—with people that I felt I was hiding from.

I feel safe in Maryland compared to other states, such as Florida, where I grew up. But the work I do and the person I am is not fully protected from the political climate around us. My team and my colleagues could be subject to criminal or civil penalties simply for helping someone follow the same affirming path I have been following for the past decade. I ask that this committee protect me, the providers I work with, and my trans siblings, by returning a favorable report on HB 691.

Sincerely,
M. Tica Torres Bolivar
Patient Access Program Manager