

Testimony in support of HB1412 (Abortion Care Access Grant Program and Fund - Establishment) to the Maryland State General Assembly House

March 8, 2024

My name is Alice Harper and I am the Executive Administrator for three abortion clinics in Maryland: Potomac Family Planning Center in Rockville, Hillcrest Clinic in Catonsville, and Hagerstown Reproductive Health Services in Hagerstown. I am writing to express my support for House Bill 1412, a bill to establish the Abortion Care Access Grant Program.

Our medical director and I have been operating abortion clinics in Maryland for over 30 years and have witnessed threats to our ability to provide care such as aggressive protesters and crisis pregnancy centers opening up next door. But, we have also seen progress and community support in the establishment of two local abortion funds (Baltimore Abortion Fund and DC Abortion Fund) and the many volunteer hours from clinic escorts from the Washington Area Clinic Defense Task Force (WACDTF). At the center of our work is ensuring compassionate and safe care to those seeking abortions in Maryland, whether they be from down the street or many states away. We are excited about the new opportunities the Abortion Care Access Grant Program will make possible and assist us in continuing to provide high quality care.

We believe security at our clinics is one part of the abortion access puzzle that allows us to provide care. We rarely need to call local police for assistance but if and when we do, our hope is that law enforcement will treat our calls with respect and knowledge. Our desire is for law enforcement across the state to understand abortion-specific laws and enforce them fairly and appropriately.

We are continuously examining new ways to ensure patients, staff, and clinic escorts are safe. Our Hagerstown clinic is a key example of the importance of security due to its proximity to a crisis pregnancy center and location that allows for protesters to follow patients all the way to our entrance. While we cannot stop protesters from interacting with patients, funds from the Abortion Care Access Grant Program would allow us to invest in better cameras and lighting to allow staff to better monitor the situation inside and outside of the clinic.

The barriers to getting to the door of our abortion clinics are not just physical protesters but monetary and logistical barriers to accessing care. Patients at our clinics can use Medicaid to pay for care, something we recognize is not the norm across the country. About 40% of our patients use Medicaid, an additional 10-20% use abortion fund funding to cover some or all of their appointment costs. We also accept some private insurance, though many plans do not cover abortion care. Many patients also chose to pay out of pocket to avoid charges showing up on bank accounts or insurance that can be traced back to their appointment. Funds from the Abortion Care Access Grant Program have the potential to help break down the monetary barriers of accessing care for many patients.

The list of logistical barriers to accessing abortion care is endless. Patients need to take time off work, pay for gas, find child care, or find a ride to and from the clinic. Of patients surveyed over the last six months at our Rockville location, over 60% indicated they would benefit from funds to help offset these logistical costs. Funds from the Abortion Care Access Grant Program could allow for patients to not only pay for their care, but offset the costs that can accumulate as part of accessing care and the post-care needs.

We are grateful to the Maryland House for considering this bill and appreciate Delegate Lopez's sponsorship. The future of abortion care is uncertain in our country but Maryland has the opportunity to be a leader and innovator through the establishment of the Abortion Care Access Grant Program.

Thank you,
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