

Support: HB0691, Legally Protected Health Care - Gender-Affirming Treatment

2/21/2024

**Maryland House of Delegates
Judiciary Committee
Health and Government Operations Committee**

I am writing this letter to express my strong support for Senate Bill 119. I urge you to vote in favor of this bill as it is crucial for ensuring the legal protection of gender-affirming care for transgender and gender-diverse individuals in Maryland.

As a pediatric endocrinologist specializing in the care of transgender and gender-diverse youth, I have witnessed firsthand the profoundly positive impact that gender-affirming healthcare can have on the lives of these individuals. Gender-affirming care, including hormone therapy, surgical interventions, and mental health support, plays a vital role in the health and well-being of transgender and gender-diverse individuals. Medical organizations such as the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and The Endocrine Society support access to gender-affirming care, recognizing it as a medically necessary treatment for those experiencing gender dysphoria.

However, despite the clear medical necessity of gender-affirming care, state laws and policies that prohibit or restrict minors' access to gender-affirming care have become more prevalent in recent years. Currently, 23 US states have implemented policies that limit young people's access to such care, affecting 38% of transgender youth who live in states with these policies. Additionally, 21 states impose professional or legal penalties on healthcare practitioners who provide gender-affirming care to minors. Some state legislatures have even passed bills that criminalize this health care. Without legal protection, providers may hesitate to offer gender-affirming care due to fear of legal consequences. This hesitancy not only limits access to essential medical treatment but also perpetuates stigma and discrimination against transgender and gender-diverse individuals.

By enacting Senate Bill 119, we can ensure that transgender and gender-diverse individuals in Maryland have access to timely and appropriate gender-affirming care that they need to live authentic and fulfilling lives. Furthermore, such legal protection can allow the safe extension of care to patients from out of state without fearing legal repercussions. Over the last couple of years, I have witnessed families, including my own patients, uprooting and disrupting their lives in order to be able to provide lifesaving and medically necessary gender-affirming care to their children. No family should be forced to choose between accessing essential medical treatment for their child and maintaining their established life and community ties. Legal protection for healthcare providers like myself who offer gender-affirming care can help reduce these barriers and improve access to care, thereby reducing health disparities within this population. It also sends a powerful message of acceptance and support to transgender and gender-diverse individuals in Maryland, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

In conclusion, I urge you to support Senate Bill 119, which will ensure the legal protection for gender-affirming care for transgender and gender-diverse individuals to in-state and out-of-state residents. By doing so, we can ensure that transgender and gender-diverse individuals receive the compassionate, affirming, and medically appropriate care they deserve. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely

Maria Eleni Nikita, MD

She/her

Assistant professor

Division of Pediatric Endocrinology

University of Maryland School of Medicine