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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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The Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

**SB 933 - Criminal Law - Causing Ingestion of an Abortion-Inducing Drug -
Prohibition (Women's Freedom From Coercion Act)**

Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the distinguished Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee for this opportunity to present Senate Bill 933 – Criminal Law – Causing Ingestion of an Abortion-Inducing Drug – Prohibition, known as the Women’s Freedom from Coercion Act.

SB 933 would prohibit a person from knowingly and willfully causing another to ingest, without their consent, an abortion-inducing drug through fraud, coercion, force, or the threat of force when the person knows or believes that the other person is pregnant. Put simply, this legislation would prohibit a very specific type of crime: when a woman chooses to keep her pregnancy to term and someone in her life eliminates that choice.

I want to be clear: this legislation does not restrict a woman from having an abortion. SB 933 is narrowly tailored to specifically address an issue on the rise in the United States: the non-consensual ingestion of abortion-inducing drugs.

May, 2013: Remelee Lee, a Florida woman who dreamed of becoming a mother, was tricked into an abortion by her boyfriend John Andrew Weldon, who gave her Cytotec, a brand of Misoprostol, telling her it was an antibiotic for infection. Lee was rushed to the hospital after taking only one pill and miscarried her baby at six weeks. When doctors inspected the pills, it was discovered that they were not antibiotics, but abortion pills. Weldon was indicted under the rarely used federal Unborn Victims of Violence Act, a murder charge that carries a life sentence.

February, 2014: A woman in Brooklyn, New York was rushed to a local hospital when she felt intense pain in her abdomen. The doctor removed two pills that had been inserted transvaginally without her consent during sexual intercourse by her boyfriend, Shervawn Remy. The doctor identified the pills as the abortion drug Cytotec, a brand of Misoprostol. Several hours later, she miscarried at 14 weeks. Remy, the father of the child, was charged criminally with forced abortion, a felony punishable by up to four years in prison under New York law.

May, 2017: Brooke Fiske from Arlington, Virginia was 17 weeks pregnant when her boyfriend Sikander Imran, a doctor, slipped a drug into her tea knowing it would likely cause her to miscarry their son. Brooke went into premature labor hours later. She was rushed to the hospital but her baby boy did not survive. Imran lost his medical license, pleaded guilty to fetal homicide and was sentenced to 20 years in prison but served only three years.

March, 2022: Catherine Herring is a Texas woman whose former husband, Mason Herring, grounded up the drug Misoprostol and poisoned her water with it in order to force an abortion without her knowledge or consent. Fortunately, Catherine realized what was happening when she found an empty package of Misoprostol in the trash and sought medical intervention in time to save the life of her daughter. Mason Herring was charged initially with felony assault to induce abortion and accepted a plea agreement on charges of injury to a child and assault of a pregnant person. Due to the poisoning, Catherine's daughter was born prematurely, requires a feeding tube, and will need lifelong medical assistance.

May, 2024: A woman in Massachusetts lost her child when her boyfriend Robert Kawanda went through an online pharmacy to obtain Misoprostol. Prosecutors say he orchestrated a call from a fake nurse to advise the victim she could take iron pills due to her blood levels. Kawanda then showed up at the victim's home with the supposed iron supplements and even checked her mouth to ensure she had consumed the drugs. The woman miscarried the next day. Robert Kawanda was criminally charged with attempted poisoning, assault, and battery with a dangerous weapon on a pregnant person and assault and battery on a household or family member.

Some of you may remember Senate Bill 561 of 2019, known as Laura and Reid's Law. Laura Wallen from Olney, Maryland was four months pregnant when she was killed in September 2017 and her boyfriend was charged with the crime, but he died in his jail cell before the trial began. Laura was killed by her boyfriend because she was pregnant, and she had planned to keep the pregnancy. She had given her future child the name Reid.

Laura and Reid's Law makes a crime of violence against a woman the perpetrator knows or believes is pregnant an additional felony with a jail sentence of up to 10 years in addition to any other sentence imposed for the underlying crime. The reason I am bringing attention to SB 561 of 2019 is to highlight that SB 933 of 2025 serves a similar purpose. Forcing a woman to ingest abortion-inducing drugs because she is pregnant is an act of domestic violence.

In 2019, we learned that nationally, one in ten pregnant women will experience physical abuse at the hands of an intimate partner, and pregnancy-associated homicide in Maryland is 10 times the national average. In 2023, The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence reported 38 fatalities due to domestic violence. Over 1 in 3 women (35.6%) and 1 in 4 men (28.5%) in the United States have experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetime.

Abusive people believe they have the right to control and restrict their partner's lives. Forcing a woman to end her pregnancy through fraud, coercion, force, or the threat of force is a form of domestic violence that eliminates her bodily autonomy and her choice.

The number of yearly abortions in the U.S. rose by 10 percent between 2020 and 2023, and the most common form is abortion-inducing drugs at 63 percent. This does not include abortions that take place within the home. In Maryland, you can have abortion pills mailed to you if you meet certain requirements, such as having a Maryland address. And while there is no specific information about the number of miscarriages in Maryland, roughly 15-20 percent of pregnancies in the United States end in miscarriage, making it the most common complication.

If someone were motivated to force a woman to ingest abortion-inducing drugs without her consent, they would have the means and opportunity, and they also would have an alibi by claiming the abortion was just a miscarriage.

Studies have found that many women who seek counseling services after having an abortion were pressured into terminating their pregnancies by their husbands, boyfriends, or family members. After having an abortion, many of these women reported symptoms of depression, guilt, shame, regret, self-hatred, feelings of worthlessness, feelings of being unworthy of love, low self-esteem, and anxiety. Some studies have found up to 9 percent reported drug or alcohol addiction, and 6.2 percent reported thoughts or attempts of suicide.

Now imagine that you wanted and planned to bring the pregnancy to term, but you thought your own body failed you, resulting in a miscarriage. Imagine the emotional pain and heartbreak you would feel, only to learn that someone took advantage of your trust and poisoned you, ignoring your choice, your bodily autonomy, and your personhood.

With abortion law being expanded in Maryland, we can expect the number of abortions to increase statewide and along with it, an increase in the forced-ingestion of an abortion-inducing drug. We do not know the exact numbers as Maryland is one of three states that does not compile nor collect women's health care data, including the cost of birth, postpartum care, pregnancy care, and abortion.

We should be concerned that 44 percent of abortions nationally are performed on African-American women despite only accounting for 13 percent of the female population. As a State with a prominent African-American population, we can assume that the Maryland percentage would be much higher.

In summary, Senate Bill 933 prohibits a person from knowingly and willfully causing another to ingest an abortion-inducing drug when the person knows or believes that the other person is pregnant and without consent, through fraud or coercion, or through force or threat of force. A person who violates someone in this manner would be subject to a felony charge and face imprisonment. I look forward to working with the Committee on this legislation to protect women from being victims of this crime of non-consensual ingestion of abortion-inducing drugs.

Thank you for your kind attention and consideration, and I request the Committee grant a favorable report to SB 933.