



## **SB0278 - State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health Maryland School-Based Health Center Standards – Telehealth**

Presented to the Hon. Paul Pinsky and Members of the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee  
January 20, 2021 3:00 p.m.

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### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

**NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee to issue a favorable report on SB0278 - State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health – Maryland School-Based Health Center Standards – Telehealth, sponsored by Senator Cheryl Kagan.**

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. We seek to protect the rights of youth seeking access to healthcare on school campuses fortunate to have school-based health centers in order to stay in school and on track to graduate. Across our state, school-based health centers have become many children's sole source of healthcare and have proven effective in diagnosing and treating illness, managing chronic health conditions, and increasing school attendance for children at risk of missing school due to mental and physical health issues<sup>i</sup>. We must do better as a state to increase healthcare should be made more readily available, and this is possible through the addition of telehealth services. SB0278 aims to do just that.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for healthcare for young people in Maryland. In the fall of 2020, one in eight households with children lacked health insurance, and the percentage of children without health insurance has steadily increased since 2018<sup>ii</sup>. Since school-based health centers can administer care to uninsured students, providers in these centers should be able to accommodate this increased need for health services among young uninsured people. Health insurance is also inaccessible to undocumented children and can be very difficult to attain for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients. Maryland is home to thousands of DACA recipients<sup>iii</sup>. We should be advocating for barrier-free access to basic healthcare for all youth that live in Maryland. Access to telehealth would allow healthcare professionals located in school-based health centers to continue administering care in an easier and more accessible way during the pandemic, and beyond. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused increased stress, and worsened existing mental health conditions like depression and anxiety in children, adolescents, and teens. As advocates for healthcare, we recognize that youth in Maryland deserve the right to pursue a quality education while effectively addressing needs related to mental health, as well as physical health issues. We recognize health equity and access to basic healthcare as a fundamental human right. We seek to remove unnecessary barriers to care and applaud advocacy to increase access to care through telehealth. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0278**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>i</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. School-Based Health Centers. Retrieved from <http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/pages/dsfs/sssp/sbhc/index.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2020). Kids, Families and Covid-19 Report. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/resources/kids-families-and-covid-19/>

<sup>iii</sup> American Immigration Council (2020). Immigrants in Maryland Fact Sheet.