



SB0815 - Mental Health Facilities - Sexual Abuse and Harassment - Reporting and Prevention
Presented to the Hon. Delores Kelley and Members of Senate Finance Committee
March 10, 2021 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the Members of Senate Finance Committee to issue a **favorable report on SB0815 and Mental Health Facilities - Sexual Abuse and Harassment - Reporting and Prevention** sponsored by Senator Kathy Klausmeier.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. All people deserve to access mental health services, free from sexual harassment, abuse, and coercion. Bodily autonomy is key to reproductive justice and safety, and without measures in place to address abuse, those seeking treatment cannot access full bodily autonomy and safety.

Mental health facilities house and serve already vulnerable populations. Those who struggle from mental illness, addiction, and/or trauma are often vulnerable to sexual harassment, assault, and abuse. While mental health facilities are tasked with protecting the vulnerable, unwarranted sexual contact still takes place in such spaces. According to a study published in the *Journal of Ethics in Mental Health*¹, seven percent of patients were estimated to have been victims of sexual misconduct. At present, in Maryland, there is no requirement for private facilities to report sexual abuse or have policies supporting survivors.

SB0815 would require mental health facilities in Maryland to develop policies and procedures to appropriately handle sexual misconduct allegations and complaints. Staff would be required to report these incidents, assist survivors with reporting, develop safety plans, and undergo training for how to identify and address sexual abuse with patients. By creating systems that require mental health facilities to report and work to prevent unwarranted sexual contact, SB0815 would protect already vulnerable populations from further harm.

Every Marylander deserves the opportunity to access mental health treatment free from fear or abuse. This legislation would require facilities to provide those opportunities for the vulnerable. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0815**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Wright, E., Heather A. McCabe and Harold E. Koorman. "Institutional Capacity to Respond to the Ethical Challenges of Patient Sexual Expression in State Psychiatric Hospitals in the United States." (2012).