



SB0286 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – Modifications

Presented to the Hon. Delores Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee

February 9, 2021 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the Senate Finance Committee to issue a favorable report on SB0286 – Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services – Modifications**, sponsored by Senator Malcolm Augustine.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. The ability to access quality and comprehensive reproductive healthcare is directly related to access to mental health support. There are associated mental health affects before, during, and after pregnancy, and pregnant women are especially vulnerable to scrutiny for their behavior. Due to poor mental health support and other compounding factors like poverty or lack of health insurance, pregnant women often self-medicate with substances or attempt suicide. Oftentimes, they are arrested, charged, and imprisoned.¹ We are hopeful that some of the grants the Department of Health will award to those proposals that “minimize law enforcement interaction with individuals in crisis,” as stated in the bill language, would entail comprehensive services for pregnant individuals who are undergoing mental health challenges. Those who may suffer from mental health issues should be met with compassionate mental health support outside of law enforcement.

There are also associated mental health concerns of the legal interventions that restrict women’s access to timely pregnancy-related healthcare. In an article published by the National Institutes of Health, the researcher found that the 2,500 state laws posing serious burden to access abortion care are more consequential on women’s mental health than previous recognized.² This is because low-income, minority women are more vulnerable to the effects of anti-abortion legislations and may already be affected by mental health challenges typically associated with poverty, racial discrimination, and poor education. As a result, these dual challenges that women face accessing reproductive and mental health care are exacerbated, and we are grateful for legislation like SB0286 that have prioritized mental health support.

For too long, Maryland’s response to mental health crisis have relied on law enforcement. We applaud this bill and its commitment to mental health support that is grounded in experienced and compassionate care.

For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0286**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Paltrow, Lynn M., and Jeanne Flavin. “Arrests of and Forced Interventions on Pregnant Women in the United States, 1973–2005: Implications for Women’s Legal Status and Public Health.” *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 38, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 299–343. <https://doi.org/10.1215/03616878-1966324>.

² Stotland, Nada Logan. “Reproductive Rights and Women’s Mental Health.” *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 40, no. 2 (2017): 335–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psc.2017.01.010>.