
BILL NO: House Bill 997
TITLE: Equal Protection for Unborn Life Act
COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations
HEARING DATE: March 19, 2021
POSITION: **OPPOSE**

House Bill 997 is an unconstitutional measure that would not only effectively ban all abortions in Maryland, but also criminalize medical care by subjecting providers to murder or manslaughter charges. While there is a narrow exception for protecting the life of the mother, the bill places equal weight on the life of the pregnant individual and fetus.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc. opposes House Bill 997 as it dangerous, unconstitutional, and violative of a woman's bodily autonomy by invading very personal decisions that women have a constitutional right to make. Decisions about pregnancy are and should remain a matter between a woman and her doctor. Doctors, who are always in the best position to determine the appropriate medical course of action, should be free to make medical decisions without fear of prosecution. Any attempt to restrict or interfere with that relationship relegates the woman to the concept of being nothing more than a "host" for the fetus.

Similarly, the bill would restrict a woman's ability to access certain fertility procedures, as it provides equal protection for zygotes and fertilized eggs – thereby preventing artificial reproductive technology procedures including in vitro fertilization.

This legislation is an unconstitutional burden on a women's right to choose. Maryland has supported a woman's right to choose at least since Question Six in 1992, and there is no support that the citizens of this state want this type of change in our public policy.

For these reasons, the Women's Law Center urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 997.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, membership organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change. The Women's Law Center operates two hotlines, Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County, the Collateral Legal Assistance for Survivors Project, and the Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project.