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Support
HB 952 – Access to Abortion Care and Health Insurance Act
House Health and Government Operations Committee
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My name is Gisell Paula, a resident of Baltimore, and I support HB 952 – Access to Abortion Care and Health Insurance Act. This bill would require abortion care be covered by the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and other state-regulated health plans.

I am the daughter of immigrants, and in more ways than one, I am my parents' and my ancestors' wildest dream come true. I travel around the country for work, am afforded the privilege of exploring my purpose in life, fiercely independent and contributor to my community. And none of this would have been possible if I didn't have access to abortion care.

When I was 20, living with my boyfriend at the time, I got pregnant. I knew having a child at my age would make both my life and the life of this possible child incredibly difficult. I knew it because I understood what it was like to grow up lacking and the toll that our lack took on my parents. I knew it because I witnessed how heart-breaking it was for my parents to yearn to provide us with things, experiences, and opportunities — but not have the time, money, energy, network or resources to do most of it. I knew I worked incredibly hard to attend a university that was way out of our reach, become a budding young professional, and began carving the etchings of the woman I've become. I knew how much my parents had sacrificed for their children. Mostly, I knew I wanted to make them proud. I want to be able to provide for them one day, but with a pregnancy lingering, I saw the chances of being able to pour back into them after having a child so young would be almost impossible.

My abortion day was not the best day of my life. However, I feel indebted to the team that was able to provide such beautiful and compassionate care to guide me through the entire process. I am appreciative that I was able to make, what was for me, a very tough decision with dignity. I am grateful that I was able to get safe care that allowed me to go to back into work the next day, with my life ostensibly uninterrupted, and with the privacy to process my decision in a way that allowed me to heal.

Contrary to some beliefs, the process of bringing an unplanned life into the world does not go from pregnancy to signed adoption papers. In practice, around 9 months of pregnancy have to happen. With that come social impacts on family, friends and career, the actual cost of giving birth, missing long periods of work, and the emotional heavy lifting that could come from having your child exist outside of you, but not having access to them.

The decision that I was able to make for myself is not one accessible to far too many Marylanders, and far too many Americans. The Access to Abortion Care and Health Insurance Act would remove barriers that almost—but not quite—existed for me. Everyone deserves access to the compassionate, respectful care I received, and the chance to make their own decisions about what path their future holds for them.

For the sake of my Maryland community, my nieces, nephews, colleagues, neighbors and friends, I urge a favorable report on HB 952. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony.