

Chandler Jones
Reisterstown, MD 21136

Chair Shane E. Pendergrass
House Office Building
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

February 17, 2022

Re: Support for HB 952

Dear Honorable Chair Pendergrass,

My name is Chandler Jones. I am a resident of Baltimore County and a third-year law student at the University of Baltimore, School of Law. I **strongly support** House Bill 952, Access to Abortion Care and Health Insurance Act.

I am a woman of faith which has continued throughout my life, from my early childhood being raised in the Christian Church and being educated in Christian private schools. My faith has persisted throughout my undergrad education at Salisbury University, even as a Philosophy major in which my religion and belief were up for debate and challenged by my peers in class discussion. And still my faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior persisted, even when His path for me led me to accessing abortion care.

In my household growing up, birth control was a taboo topic and as a result I was never well informed on the topic. "Saving myself for marriage," was the only guidance I received on the topic and for most of my life I followed that advice, and then I fell in love. My junior year of undergrad, I was a full-time student, double majoring in English Literature and Philosophy, acting president of the Philosophical society, teaching philosophy in local elementary schools as a volunteer, working as an assistant manager at a fast-food restaurant. Amid college exams, organizing community events, and all the other responsibilities I had taken on, I had also decided that I would be applying to law school and God had brought to me a young Christian, military man also in undergrad who I began a new relationship with – my first ever serious romantic relationship.

At this time in my life, I felt extremely blessed. I was doing well in school, an active member in the community, had a sense of purpose for my future, and I was in a committed and supportive relationship. Then, I noticed a slight shift. I've always been well-attuned to my body, and I could sense a change. I had an indescribable feeling – I just knew I was pregnant. Personally, I believe the sense of knowing came from God, but others may describe it as women's intuition. There was no physical change I could point to, but the nagging feeling persisted until finally I decided to stop at a pharmacy on my way to work after classes. During my mid-shift break, I finally had a moment to myself.

I found out I was pregnant in a dingy, poorly lit employee bathroom at the back of the store. I wasn't surprised when I saw the results, yet I still stared in disbelief. I had always wanted to be a mother, in that moment I still did, and to this day I still do. Sitting there in the bathroom, I allowed myself to imagine a possible future where I was a mother in college, working part-time, eventually graduating, and beginning law school. I tried so hard to fit a baby into my already curated life plan. My boyfriend was graduating that year but because of his military career, he was expected in Connecticut for Officer Candidate School and then he would

be stationed wherever the military decided for him. I had a year left of undergrad and was preparing my application for law schools in Baltimore and D.C., so I had begun studying for the LSATs. Despite all that I thought maybe I could embrace my unexpected pregnancy and live my additional dream of being a mother just a little earlier than I expected. A baby wouldn't come right away, I had time to plan and prepare. In that moment, my faith in God and His plan for my life allowed me to find a sense of peace. I prayed to Him for His guidance in the situation and to allow me to possess the discernment necessary to make the best decision for my life according to His plan. Lastly, I recited my favorite Bible verse in my mind as a meditation, "And we know that all things work together for the good of those who love Christ and are called according to His purpose," Romans 8:28.

My boyfriend picked me up from work that night since I did not have a car and he had insisted on driving me home when I worked late due to safety concerns about me walking home by myself in the dark, but also so we would have a chance to see each other during our busy weeks. I told him about the pregnancy. We talked. We laughed and cried. We indulged in my fantasies from earlier and we decided as much as we wanted to have kids together and to start a family with each other now was not the time for either of us. He supported my dream of being a lawyer and I supported his dream of being a helicopter rescue pilot, two dreams we had already worked so hard to achieve but still had years of training and education to acquire before those dreams could be fulfilled. Our dream of having a family together was something we both wanted, but not until after we established more stability in our respective careers and personal finances.

Unfortunately, on the Eastern Shore, my options to obtain abortion care were extremely limited. I made an appointment with the on-campus student health center and tried to ask them how to access an abortion. I was met with a dead end and a nurse who thought it was appropriate to share her personal stance on abortion, urging almost pleading with me to reconsider my decision. "Abortion isn't your only option," she told me before I left. Then, I googled places near me to get abortions and the closest listing was a family planning center that I came to find out was actually an anti-abortion pregnancy center. I called to schedule an appointment and discovered that despite the website's appearance they did not actually offer abortions only counseling to help me make the decision that was right for me. I had already made my decision and as uneducated as I was on abortion access, I knew there was a limited window for me to access the care I needed. I knew that Planned Parenthood offered abortion care but the nearest one was in Easton, Maryland, an hour drive. As the closest available option, I called to make an appointment. Due to limited availability, the wait was long, too long for my comfort. The soonest appointment I could make was at a Planned Parenthood in Delaware, an hour and a half away. With no other options available I scheduled the appointment, emailed my professors that I would not be attending classes that day, and texted a few co-workers to find someone to cover my shift.

I had a supportive partner. He had access to a car. We had access to enough funds to cover the cost of the care. If any one of those things weren't true, I would not be in law school right now. Access to abortion care has allowed me to walk the path that I know is the right one for me.

Lifting restrictions on already qualified providers would increase the availability of abortion care, especially in places like the Eastern Shore, where I went to college. Future students like me wouldn't find themselves in need of a car or to cross state lines to access reproductive healthcare because as a young high school student picking out a college, I did not – and one should have to consider whether I would have access to reproductive healthcare.

Requiring insurance plans to cover abortion fully reduces the financial burden on people seeking care. As an assistant manager at a pizza restaurant, I did not make enough money to cover the care, but I was fortunate enough to have access to additional funds. However, not everyone has the resources and opportunities God has blessed me with in my life.

My mother grew up below the poverty line in Indiana, she had her first child at seventeen, and dropped out after her junior year of high school. Fortunately, she was able to go back to school eventually earning a master's degree in her early forties. By the time I was born my mother already had her bachelor's in nursing and owned her own house at the end of a cul-de-sac, but my older half-sister, born before those opportunities had been realized, grew up on food stamps in a trailer park with a mother who was exhausted from working nightshifts and attending school part-time. My mother escaped poverty through education, and she worked hard not only to support her children but to be an example of a possible future with less economic hardships. I witnessed my mother working full-time, attending graduate school part-time, and finally earning her master's degree in nursing during her late 30s and early 40s. My half-sister started college but after a semester she dropped out because at 19 she was pregnant with my niece. My sister never returned to school to finish her degree and throughout my life I witnessed her financial struggle with her partner to provide for their three children. On my 20th birthday, I secretly celebrated the fact that I had escaped my teenage years without following in the footsteps of my mother and my older sister. I thanked God for helping to break what I felt at the time was a generational curse, but what I have come to realize had actually been the result of a lack of resources, education, opportunity, and access to reproductive healthcare, including abortion care.

For the foregoing reasons, I urge a favorable report on HB 952. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

Chandler Jones