



## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 798: Declaration of Rights - Right to Reproductive Freedom**

**TO:** Chair Melanie Griffith and Vice Chair Katherine Klausmeier of the Finance Committee

**FROM:** Sharon Blugis, Interim Executive Director, Pro-Choice Maryland

**DATE:** Tuesday, February 28, 2023

Pro-Choice Maryland is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates for policies that protect reproductive freedom and that advance reproductive justice. Pro-Choice Maryland **strongly supports the right of ALL individuals to full bodily autonomy and to unequivocal control over their own health and healthcare decisions.**

As was made clear on June 24, 2022, the day that the US Supreme Court for the first time in history decided to roll back human rights that had been previously expanded by overturning *Roe v. Wade*, we cannot take reproductive rights for granted. For the past six months, other states have launched extensive attacks on the right of all individuals to make their own healthcare decisions, and we cannot rely on federal authorities to protect our residents: we *must* act, as a state, to codify bodily autonomy into our Constitution.

Further, polls consistently show that over 70% of Americans overwhelmingly approved of the long-held *Roe v. Wade* decision, and 80% of Americans support abortion access in all or most cases. Thus, it is even more concerning that extreme right-wing groups and anti-abortion politicians continue to pass laws banning or restricting this essential, life-saving care. When abortion was on the ballot in Montana, Kansas, Michigan, California, and Vermont, voters resoundingly supported abortion access. House Bill 705 would establish this widely popular right via a ballot initiative, which is an important measure that would lend the amendment legitimacy by reflecting overwhelming support from Maryland voters. Access to safe, legal, and accessible abortion and reproductive health care is not only a moral imperative, but it also has enormous social, economic, and health benefits to individuals, families, and communities. Bans and restrictions on abortion and reproductive care harm pregnant people with particular impact on people of color, inappropriately interfere in the trusted doctor-patient relationship, are linked to negative maternal health outcomes, and serve an agenda that would have all pregnancy outcomes scrutinized, controlled, and criminalized. We must trust and empower pregnant people to make the best decisions about their lives and their pregnancies.

We applaud this common-sense effort to further enshrine the right to reproductive freedom in Maryland and we strongly urge the committee to lead the way, honor abortion access as essential, vital healthcare, and to **return a favorable report on Senate Bill 798.**