

From: Sarah Parsons: Chairperson, Allegany County Women's Action Coalition
To: Maryland House of Delegates, 02/27/2023
Re: Declaration of Rights - Right to Reproductive Freedom - Senate Bill 798
Position: Favorable

My name is Sarah Parsons, and I am a lifelong resident of Mountain Maryland, and a community activist. I'm offering this written testimony today in support of the Declaration of Rights - Right to Reproductive Freedom - Senate Bill 798. The importance of this bill is immeasurable in the rights and protections it will provide to the women of our great state, in furthering our bodily autonomy, in taking greater steps towards equity, and in support of our ability to make some of life's most important decisions for ourselves. In rural Mountain Maryland reproductive healthcare is neither easily accessible nor affordable, and misinformation and stigma still hamper us. Our own state delegation often remarks that they speak for the people of our area, and that our priorities are different than in other parts of the state particularly on issues such as those covered by this bill. However, in our part of Western Maryland, there is a large and growing constituency who understand that reproductive healthcare, including education, family planning, contraception and abortion, must be easily accessible and affordable for all - as a matter of right.

It has been shown that lack of access to reproductive healthcare can have monumental negative health impacts for all people, but in particular on women, trans individuals, and children. Unintended pregnancies are shown to have an adverse impact on maternal health and mortality, but also on the physical and mental health of children as well as infant mortality. Additionally, lack of access does not decrease the number of abortions, but rather simply increases the number of illegal and dangerous abortions. Also, lack of access to birth control, family planning, education, and abortion has also been shown to have a catastrophic financial impact on people, particularly in communities of color and economically depressed and rural communities, and has a profound impact on the ability of young people and families to thrive and succeed, and indeed impacts our communities' economic development as well.

- <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2023/limiting-abortion-access-american-women-impacts-health-economic-security>
- <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/features/abortion-restrictions-health-implications/>
- <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/limiting-abortion-access-contributes-poor-maternal-health-outcomes/>
- <https://health.maryland.gov/pophealth/Pages/Rural-health.aspx>
- <https://www.guttmacher.org/2023/01/inequity-us-abortion-rights-and-access-end-roe-deepening-existing-divides>

On a personal note, I simply cannot overstate the importance of this bill. I'm a mother to two daughters, and I want them to live in a state that respects their choices and treats them as equal citizens. When my youngest was born, there were conditions that lead to me experiencing birth trauma, and while I would not change a single thing about my choices, I had the privilege of choice and now the privilege of perspective to know that those choices and decisions are private, and personal, and should not be thrust upon anyone, nor taken away or limited by any government. Your rights to your body, and the choices surrounding your body are your own, and our state needs to protect those rights which are currently under attack across the nation. Thank you to the committee for your time and consideration. I am very strongly in support of Senate Bill 798.

Sincerely,
Sarah Parsons