

I suppose I should start back in the early 2000's when I threw up on arrival to James Hubert Blake High School in Montgomery County. I went to the nurse and asked for a pregnancy test. She told me about a series of young girls that had been coming to her, asking me if I too was a victim of the lie that hand sanitizer could be used as a lube/spermicide instead of using a condom. I shook my head no but also failed to mention that I had been raped by a close friend. She referred me to a Crises Pregnancy Center for a pregnancy test and sent me on my way with some crackers. I got my positive test results, but I also got inundated with false information and shame about abortion care, which I so naively asked about. I wish the nurse had sent me to the Health Department.

Incapable of communicating with my parents why I could no longer sleep in their house (having been raped in my bedroom), I ran away. I asked my boss to lend me money for an abortion, but was denied. Homeless and scared, I somehow scrambled the money and made my appointment. I've never felt so alone, but I knew it was, for me, my only option. I am so grateful I had an abortion and this decision must be protected.

That was over 20 years ago, and I now live in Garrett County, Maryland and work with at-risk youth (15-18 years old). It's usually when driving kids home that they share with me more personal stories. Stories like their fathers, grandfathers, or cousins molesting and/or raping them as they grew up. This is common in Garrett County.

I've gone to the Health Department, gathered all their pamphlets on contraception, hidden them in magazines, and handed them off to students in need. I've called CPS when informed that one of my kids, who came out that he was gay, was sent away to conversion therapy by his parents. Unfortunately, they sent him from his fathers house in WV, where conversion therapy is legal, so he had no protections. I remember him telling me how relieved he was to be gay because that meant he didn't have to worry about getting pregnant or STD's (I softly corrected him and asked him to research the AIDS pandemic). I have had several trans kids who go by a different name in the program than at home, unable to come out to their families. Reproductive education and care is appalling in Garrett County.

Friends, workers, and community organizers have opened up to me, shared their experience getting abortions while living in Garrett County. Having to travel, hold their stories close so as not to be rejected by their peers as abortion is so stigmatized, and even Republican men (farmers) who have shared how they think their party has gone too far restricting abortion care across the country.

I am now a trained driver for Baltimore Abortion Fund so that I can drive patients to their reproductive care appointments, over 2 hours away, because we don't have abortion care in Western Maryland.

We need proper protections for those willing to provide reproductive health care, including access to education, contraception, abortion and gender affirming care. I need protections as well

as the people receiving care (Marylander's, but also those traveling from out of State where care is illegal). Abortion is a health care need.