

Testimony for Senate Bill 859: Reproductive Health Protection Act

Senator Smith, Senator Waldstreicher, and members of the Committee:

The Baltimore Abortion Fund (BAF) is a community-centered nonprofit that provides financial and logistical support to Maryland residents and to people traveling to Maryland for abortion care. BAF operates a confidential helpline where our case managers provide information and make financial commitments to help clients pay for their procedures.

For decades, abortion seekers in states with abortion bans and restrictions have traveled to Maryland to receive care that is unavailable in their own states. With relatively few abortion restrictions and with three clinics providing abortions later in pregnancy, Maryland is uniquely positioned as a lifeline for abortion seekers in the South and Midwest. While traveling for abortion care isn't new, since the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision in 2022, the volume of patients being forced to make the journey to Maryland for legal abortion care is increasing. Following *Dobbs*, BAF's lodging expenses for our traveling clients in the second half of 2022 totaled nearly seven times those expenses in the first half of 2022.

Abortion bans are not based in science or medicine, but in other governments' desires to deprive their constituents of their human right to bodily autonomy. It is vital not only that our state has enough providers to meet the growing demand for abortion care, but also that the providers and logistical supporters of this essential care are safe from out-of-state litigation. With a volunteer network of more than 100 Marylanders, the shielding of people who are on the ground supporting access to abortion care is vital to BAF's work.

Many states that have enacted abortion restrictions are also considering or implementing restrictions on gender-affirming care (GAC) – including our neighbor, West Virginia. As such, Maryland is also becoming a lifeline for transgender people seeking GAC – but it is not prepared to shield providers and logistical supporters of this essential care from the same genre of out-of-state litigation. That must change.

Abortion care and gender-affirming care are both essential forms of health care. Both are avenues that allow gender-marginalized people the bodily autonomy to build their lives as they see fit. Both are under attack by politicians and groups who seek to control the reproduction and expression of their constituents. Both must be protected by this legislation.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to return a favorable report on SB859, with an amendment that will shield providers and logistical supporters of gender-affirming care.