



Testimony on SB859/HB808
Reproductive Health Protection Act
Position: **Favorable with Amendment**

To Chair Smith & Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee; Chair Pena-Melnyk & Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee; Chair Clippinger & Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones. I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation, representing over 10,000 members in the Maryland/DC region. We represent healthcare workers who provide abortion care and urge a favorable with amendment report on the Reproductive Health Protection Act. There is a super majority in Maryland that believes personal healthcare decisions should be made between a healthcare provider and their patient, without influence from the government or an employer. As a healthcare workers union, we are loud and clear that abortion is healthcare. This bill will ensure that our State will never cooperate with out-of-state investigations into providers of reproductive healthcare that is legal in our state.

As access to reproductive healthcare is being politicized and attacked elsewhere in the nation, it is critically important we pass SB859/HB808 this year. Maryland will likely see an influx of abortion seeking refugees travelling from states that have severely limited or no access to reproductive healthcare. We cannot allow other states to dictate the types of healthcare we are allowed to practice in our state. This bill will provide much needed protection for healthcare workers like our members that provide abortion care.

We have a short staffing crisis across the healthcare industry in Maryland. This is particularly concerning because it adversely impacts patients', like patients who need abortion care, ability to be treated in a time-sensitive manner for urgent medical issues. If other states can target our healthcare providers, it will limit access to abortion in Maryland and it will make the short staffing crisis worse.

Again, we are in strong support of SB859/HB808, however the bill is incomplete. There is another form of life saving, essential healthcare that is being politicized and attacked elsewhere in the nation. I'm speaking of course about Gender Affirming Healthcare (GAC). 1199SEIU represents members who are GAC providers. We are requesting an amendment to this bill to include protections for healthcare workers who provide GAC. **Many healthcare workers who provide abortions also provide GAC. When we protect one type of healthcare but not the other, we are still leaving our abortion care providers at risk of being targeted.** There has been a rise in threats against GAC providers in the same way there have been threats against abortion care providers. These threats and attacks are coming from the same regressive, extremist forces. When this bill is passed and abortion care providers are shielded for providing abortion care, but they are not shielded for providing GAC, then abortion care providers will not be truly protected because they will be targeted for providing GAC instead. This can reduce access to abortion care in Maryland. Furthermore, abortion care and GAC are not mutually exclusive – as there are transgender people who need access to abortion care too.

“My body, my choice” and the fundamental value that healthcare decisions should be made between patients and providers applies to *both* GAC and reproductive healthcare-- as should the Reproductive Health Protection Act. **We urge a favorable with amendment report on SB859/HB808.** Maryland's healthcare providers care for us, now we are asking you to care for them by passing this bill. Thank you.

In Unity,
Ricarra Jones, ricarra.jones@1199.org