



Committee: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Bill Number: Senate Bill 859

Title: Reproductive Health Care Protection Act

Hearing Date: March 1, 2023

Position: Favorable

The Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors of Maryland (LCPCM) supports *Senate Bill 859 – Reproductive Health Care Protection Act*. The bill would protect Maryland providers and their patients from criminal, civil, and administrative penalties for legally protected health care, including abortion and other reproductive health care services.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v Wade* with the *Dobbs* decision, fourteen states have banned abortion, and almost a dozen more states will have enacted total bans or severe restrictions by the end of this year. People are having to travel hundreds of miles to obtain abortion care. Here in Maryland, we are seeing patients come from nearby West Virginia and from as far away as Texas for abortion care.

Many of the states are enacting abortion bans that penalize health care providers. For example, laws in Texas, Oklahoma, and Idaho permit private citizens to sue anyone aiding or abetting their states' residents in obtaining abortion care. These laws put a full range of providers, including professional counselors, in legal peril. They cannot provide counseling related to pregnancy options or make referrals for abortion services without risking losing their licenses and being sued. This situation is untenable, as health professionals are ethically bound to act in the best interests of their patients.

The Reproductive Health Act protects Maryland health providers by shielding them from criminal, civil, and administrative penalties for providing support related to reproductive health care; and more importantly, this act protects Maryland patients from intimidation when making their own reproductive health decisions.

We ask for a favorable report. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.