

Testimony of the Human Trafficking Prevention Project

BILL NO: Senate Bill 460
TITLE: Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Gender-Affirming Treatment (Trans Health Equity Act)
COMMITTEE: Health and Governmental Operations
HEARING DATE: March 28, 2023
POSITION: FAVORABLE

Senate Bill 460 would expand Medicaid coverage to include lifesaving gender-affirming care for transgender Marylanders. The Human Trafficking Prevention Project at the University of Baltimore School of Law supports this bill because it will provide nonbinary, transgender, and gender-nonconforming Marylanders with the accessible, comprehensive, and medically necessary care they deserve, which, in turn, greatly reduces the stigma, violence, and exploitation they so commonly face.

Efforts at raising public awareness about the crime of human trafficking commonly ignores the impact that gender identity and gender presentation has on a person's vulnerability to trafficking. The reality is that nonbinary, transgender, and gender non-conforming people are made disproportionately more vulnerable to being trafficked because of the discrimination and isolation that they so often face, which commonly translates into the hallmarks of heightened trafficking risk including interpersonal violence, financial instability, homelessness, and drug use. One of the most common forms of discrimination that nonbinary, transgender, and gender non-conforming people face is the lack of access to gender-affirming healthcare.

According to Trans Maryland, a multi-racial, multi-gender community power building organization for Maryland's transgender community, the number of transgender Marylanders on Medicaid is only approximately 2000 people, and, given that gender transition is unique to each individual, not every transgender person on Medicaid will access these services, or any services at all. As they rightly point out, the small size of the community, combined with the urgency of the need to access this type of care, means that this is an easy gap to close.

Lack of access to gender-affirming care can be incredibly dangerous for transgender people, greatly impacting their access to housing, employment, and education, as well as their freedom to safely navigate social spaces. Experiences like these typically drive affected individuals further into isolation, which is why so many nonbinary, transgender, and gender non-conforming people are forced to exist on the margins of society where they face a far greater risk of violence and exploitation. The availability of gender-affirming healthcare ought to be commonplace here in Maryland, because for so many transgender Marylanders, this is truly a matter of life and death.

In recent years, Maryland has begun to show its support for *preventing* human trafficking and other forms of violence by addressing the societal challenges that make its citizens more vulnerable to exploitation. SB 460 would further this goal by reducing the stigma that nonbinary, transgender, and gender non-conforming persons face by providing them with gender-affirming, lifesaving healthcare. This will, in turn, affirm the humanity of these individuals, making them less vulnerable to the harms that so commonly precede a trafficking experience. Additionally, in a time of unprecedented and unsubstantiated attacks on the rights of transgender people, it is crucial that Maryland stand up and say conclusively that policies driven *or* denied by fear and intolerance have no place in our state. For these reasons, the Human Trafficking Prevention Project supports Senate Bill 460, and respectfully urges a favorable report.