



BILL NO: Senate Bill 859
TITLE: Reproductive Health Protection Act
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: March 28, 2023
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 859.**

Domestic violence is about power and control, and many abusers choose to weaponize a partner's bodily autonomy and reproductive choices as tools of violence. Reproductive justice is an essential component of gender equality and for victims of domestic violence abortion access is essential for their safety. The devastating Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* eviscerated the right to bodily autonomy and the right to have an abortion. Access to abortions can be a matter of life or death for victims of domestic violence and pregnant victims are at a higher risk of being killed by their abuser. Victims frequently experience forms of abuse that put them at an increased risk for unintended pregnancy, such as birth control sabotage, sexual assault, and reproductive coercion.

Senate Bill 859 states unequivocally that Maryland will not participate in the concerted actions of anti-abortion states designed to intimidate Maryland patients and providers and have a chilling effect on the accessing of critical reproductive health care services. SB859 will protect health care providers, patients, and the people who support patients in their reproductive health decisions from criminal charges, civil litigation, and administrative penalties.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Whole Women's Health*, 14 states have already fully or nearly banned abortion, and another ten are expected to do so. Over 300 abortion-related bills have already been filed this year across the country, the majority of which are anti-abortion. With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, many of them now target providers¹. These consequences have had the very intentional impact of deterring providers across the country from providing not only abortion care even to save a woman's life, but also pregnancy care, including the delaying of services until complications rise to the level of life-threatening, in

¹ [Many States Impose a Jail Sentence for Doctors Who Perform Abortions Past Gestational Limits](#), Kaiser Family Foundation, May 22, 2023

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order to avoid imprisonment. This legislation is therefore necessary to protect Maryland providers and Maryland patients.

Fourteen states, plus the District of Columbia, have already taken action to shield patients and providers from liability related to legally protected health care, either through Executive Order or statute. Maryland must act now to do the same. We will only have reproductive freedom in Maryland if we shield ourselves from the threats and intimidation tactics of other states. It is worth noting that those providing or pursuing reproductive health care are not the only ones at risk in the current legal and political environment. Across the nation, many states that are seeking to criminalize abortion are simultaneously passing measures to criminalize gender-affirming care and those that seek it. MNADV would support measures to include gender-affirming care to the definition of legally protected health care as it would further protect providers and patients in our state.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges a favorable report on SB 859.**