

POSITION: Favorable SB527 “Community Colleges – Contraception – Access Requirements”
TO: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
DATE: February 13, 2024
FROM: Judy A. Carbone, Swanton, Garrett County, MD
Mountain Maryland Alliance for Reproductive Freedom (MMARF)

My name is Judy Carbone, and I am testifying today as a member of the Mountain Maryland Alliance for Reproductive Freedom (MMARF), a non-partisan, grassroots organization of people in Allegany and Garrett Counties, committed to assuring and expanding reproductive healthcare and freedom to residents in rural Mountain Maryland. I am also a member of AAUW-Garrett Branch, part of the American Association of University Women, the largest women’s equity organization in the county. Most of all, I am testifying as a resident of Garrett County.

I ask that the committee deliver a favorable vote on SB527. This bill is an important protection to all Marylanders, but this bill is particularly important to residents of Mountain Maryland and students at Garrett College and Allegany College of Maryland. I’d like to specifically address the need for access to contraception in residence halls in rural communities.

Last year, this body approved a similar bill that affected public 4-year universities in the University of Maryland System. It was a good bill and done for all the right reasons, but it left out public community colleges. Those of us with community colleges in our communities saw that then and vowed to correct that in the future. I am grateful to Senators Kelly and Kagan for bringing SB527 forward in this session.

I ask that you deliver a favorable vote as having been a Student Affairs administrator in higher education for over 30 years, including 11 years at Garrett College in McHenry, MD. Garrett College, as you may know, is the first community college in Maryland to have residential students, many of whom don’t have cars. One of the challenges for students at Garrett College when I was employed there was the lack of public transportation for students who lived on campus, as well as it is for students who attended classes from the local community. The closest grocery store for resident hall students is about 1 and a half miles away; the closest pharmacy is across Rt. 219 from the grocery store; the closest medical facility is near the pharmacy. In bad weather, especially our snowy and blustery winters, the walk to these locations seems even farther.

If a student wants to get more discounted products at WalMart, the nearest one is more than 12 miles away in Oakland, MD. The walk to WalMart, should one try to attempt it on the sunniest of days, is complicated further by our hilly terrain.

In short, if students don’t have access to their own car, going to the store for needed supplies is hard, even harder if a student needs over-the-counter contraception during a small window of time as is the case with Plan-B contraception.

In my roles as a Student Affairs administrator, several times I was asked to sit in on Judicial Hearings by the Director of the Residence Halls. For those who don't live or work in residence halls, let me tell you that attending and judging in such hearings is an eye-opening experience, one that gives great insight into the minds of traditional aged college students being on their own for the first time in their lives. In one particularly memorable case, a young woman living in the residence hall brought charges against a young man who was also a resident. As happens, a party took place one night and both the young woman and young man imbibed more than they should have, the young woman even more so. He ended up taking liberties with the young woman of which she was barely aware in her drunken state. Luckily, there was no need for Plan-B contraception with that situation, although if there had been, since she wasn't sexually active and hadn't planned on anything happening and since there was no 24/7 access to contraception, she would have been in a bad place in that regard.

In listening to the young man's justification of his actions and his own defensive statements that he really hadn't done anything wrong...that it was all in "good fun"...it was a crystal clear example of how the decision making processes of young, inexperienced people can lead in the moment to a bad decision that is life changing. Had the incident proceeded to rape, he wouldn't be sitting in front of a student affairs Judicial Hearing but rather sitting with law enforcement. If he had proceeded to rape, the young woman could have found herself pregnant with no contraception recourse afterwards. Both of their economic, emotional, educational, and social lives would have been changed forever and very likely changed for the worse.

The point is young people make decisions at times that turn out not to be very good ones. They deserve access to Plan B and similar contraception that allow them to keep an unwanted pregnancy from happening and steer clear of altering the trajectory of their lives in an unwanted direction.

Of course, young people often make good decisions about actions they take in the future and want to be responsible when it comes to having sex. These young people need to be supported in taking such responsibility by having access to contraception in advance. Being community college students in our rural communities that lack easily accessible transportation, providing 24/7 access to contraception through vending machines is a way to support students in being responsible when sexually active.

Again, I ask you to give your full support to SB527 and afford the same access for community college students to contraception that this body gave last year to their counterparts at public 4-year universities.

Thank you.