

Bill Number: SB527

Title: Community Colleges - Contraception - Access Requirements

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Hearing Date: 02/14/2024

Submitted by: **The Mountain Maryland Alliance for Reproductive Freedom**

Position: FAVORABLE

The Mountain Maryland Alliance for Reproductive Freedom is a non-partisan, grassroots organization of people in Allegany and Garrett Counties committed to assuring and expanding reproductive healthcare in rural Mountain Maryland. We worked very hard in the last session to represent all of those in our rural counties who support access to and education about reproductive health and to help pass the full package of reproductive health legislation in 2023.

We now strongly support this bill to close the gap in access to over-the-counter-contraception between students at 4-year public universities and students at public community colleges. We understand both how important it is to have access to contraception, including emergency contraception, as well as the challenges that people in rural areas like ours face in doing so.

Being able to make informed reproductive choices and to prevent unplanned pregnancy is an essential part of reproductive freedom. By providing on-campus access to over-the-counter contraceptives, we can empower students to make informed reproductive health choices just as their adult lives are taking shape. And, if we do not do so, the impact on students will be significant - more than 60% of community college students who have children after enrolling do not finish their education. That interferes with their life plans and their ability to access future opportunities for career and economic success. It can have generational consequences for years.

We also know that in rural areas like ours, accessing a drug store can be challenging without having scheduled public transportation or access to a car. Students in rural areas have a particular need for on-campus access to over-the-counter contraception.

Finally, college healthcare providers tell us, and academic studies show, that college students need education and counseling about all aspects of reproductive health, including sex, contraception and STDs, <https://beyondthepill.ucsf.edu/news/beyond-pill-research-finds-community-college-students-need-better-birth-control-education>. Access to contraception coupled with education is critical - we hope that our colleges and universities and the Maryland Department of Health will work to ensure that the educational and counseling component is provided on-campus, along with access to contraception.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on this bill. And we appreciate the steadfast efforts of our Maryland legislators and allies in seeking to improve reproductive health for Marylanders.