



March 20, 2024

The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senate Bill 119 - Legally Protected Health Care-Gender-Affirming Treatment- FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and House Health And Government Operations Committee Members,

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) is an advocacy organization that mobilizes community members for the health, dignity, and safety of people targeted by the war on drugs and anti- sex worker policies. As a certified Syringe Service Program we have provided essential health services across the state to trans individuals for years. For this reason and more we support SB119, the Legally Protected Health Care-Gender Affirming Treatment bill.

Maryland nurses and physicians see trans patients daily across Maryland. Existing legislation does not explicitly protect those providing gender affirming treatment. It is necessary to protect providers from possible prosecution for conducting essential gender affirming treatment services, such as Hormone Replacement Therapy which requires the types of supplies we provide. In the future, medical providers could become more fearful of providing these essential services, resulting in limited access to care. Without access to these services, our state would push vulnerable trans and gender diverse Marylanders further into the margins, exposing them to unemployment, housing discrimination, harassment, and interpersonal violence.

Protecting access to gender-affirming treatment is a community harm reduction strategy and supported by public health research. Studies have shown that transgender and gender diverse people with a history of gender-affirming surgery have significantly lower rates of behavioral health concerns such as substance use, suicidal ideation,¹ and sharing non-sterile syringes needed for gender-affirming medical care.²

Gender-affirming treatment providers deserve to be safe in order to provide necessary and vital care to trans Marylanders. **BHRC respectfully urges this committee to return a favorable report on SB119.**

For more information about BHRC on our position, contact owen@baltimoreharmreduction.org.

¹ Almazan AN, Keuroghlian AS. Association Between Gender-Affirming Surgeries and Mental Health Outcomes. *JAMA Surg.* 2021;156(7):611–618. doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2021.0952

² Jennifer L. Glick, Katherine M. Andrinopoulos, Katherine P. Theall, and Cari Kendall. Tiptoeing Around the System: Alternative Healthcare Navigation Among Gender Minorities in New Orleans. *Transgender Health* 2018 3:1, 118-126