



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 15, 2024

House Bill 884

**Public Health - Pregnancy - Coercion (Protecting Pregnant Women Against
Coercive Abuse and Human Trafficking)
House Health and Government Operations Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 884 prohibits an individual from committing or threatening certain actions, including certain actions related to sex trafficking, with the intent of coercing a pregnant woman to have an abortion; providing that a pregnant minor is considered an emancipated minor for purposes of eligibility for public assistance if the minor is denied financial support from a parent or guardian due to the minor's refusal to have an abortion; etc.

This bill highlights that many women have reported being coerced into abortions, leading to severe physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual harm. A significant percentage of women, almost 70%, view their abortions as inconsistent with their values, and one in four considers their abortions as unwanted or coerced.¹ Victims of sex trafficking are particularly vulnerable to coerced abortions due to their circumstances. Providing women with information about their rights and treatment options leads to an increase in reported cases of coerced or attempted coerced abortions.

Coercive abuse poses a serious threat to women's health, and women should not endure threats, harm, repercussions, or violence. The decision to continue with a pregnancy should be free from any form of coercion. Women deserve the freedom to choose life without being subject to coercive abuse. The proposed House Bill 884 aims to empower women by addressing coercive abuse and sex trafficking, ensuring that women can make pregnancy decisions without coercion.

¹ <https://lozierinstitute.org/hidden-epidemic-nearly-70-of-abortions-are-coerced-unwanted-or-inconsistent-with-womens-preferences/>

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **HB 884**.

Thank you for your consideration.