

The Honorable Joseline Peña-Melnyk
House Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

March 15, 2024

Re: House Bill 884 — Public Health - Pregnancy - Coercion (Protecting Pregnant Women Against Coercive Abuse and Human Trafficking) — Letter of Opposition

Honorable Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Committee Members,

I write to you in strong opposition to House Bill (HB) 884, which alleges to protect pregnant people from human trafficking. The bill would require a variety of signage to be prominently posted and perform in-person screenings regarding patients' rights to not be forced to receive abortions. It also imposes mandatory waiting periods should any health care provider, employee, or volunteer know, allege, or suspect that it is possible the pregnant person is being forced to receive an abortion.

Abortion providers already screen for signs of coercion and ensure that the person receiving abortion care is of sound mind and is not under duress. The requirements to post additional signage and compel providers to perform a prescribed speech are duplicative of current practices. **However, these are not the true aims of this bill.**

This bill's true aims lie in pages 6–8. It sets up a way for an anti-abortion advocate to volunteer or become employed with an abortion provider, and simply purport that any given patient has been coerced. If the abortion provider does not wait the requisite waiting period, then the provider is barred from being associated with any abortion provider ever again.

By imposing this asinine punishment, it creates an environment in which all abortion providers will abide by the waiting period for *all* patients due to fear of being accused of wrongdoing. Should a provider not force patients to use that waiting period, it would take a single anonymous phone call from a bad actor (or even a well-meaning one) to make that provider unemployable by any abortion provider.

This bill is simply an attempt to create a de facto mandatory waiting period in the State. This runs contrary to the intent of our State's constitution, as well as the desire for freedom of choice for all pregnant people in Maryland. Let us not restrict the freedom of individuals in Maryland to make their own choices by allowing this bad-faith legislation mar the otherwise excellent abortion rights in the State. I urgently and fully hope this Committee will give an unfavorable report on this dangerous, disingenuous, and dastardly bill.

Most respectfully,
Christopher McGrath
Baltimore City, Maryland