

Statement in Opposition HB 1047 “Consumer Protection - Self-Administered Sexual Assault Evidence Kits”

Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Leda Health’s mission is to increase support for survivors of sexual assault. As a survivor of sexual assault working alongside a dedicated group of allies, we, at Leda Health, believe fundamental change is necessary in sexual assault prevention, care, and healing. We view the issue of sexual assault through a survivor-focused lens, and we firmly believe in empowering survivors with the tools and resources necessary to take control of their healing and justice. That is why we have developed self-administered sexual assault evidence collection kits. We believe that making this resource broadly available is critical to incidents that would otherwise go unreported, untreated, and unsolved. In line with our mission, we are writing to express our opposition to HB1047, as we believe it is essential to advocate for policies that support and empower survivors.

Staggeringly, only an estimated 30% of survivors report their sexual assault to authorities, and this figure is much less for members of marginalized communities and people of color. In Maryland, over 1,800 rapes were reported in 2020—think of all the incidents that go unreported. This is an astronomical figure that deserves immediate attention, particularly in service of women of color, who are much less likely to report sexual assault than white women.

That’s why it’s critical that our communities, including healthcare providers, non-profit organizations, legislators, and colleges and universities, come together to empower survivors with more resources. Accordingly, over the past few months, we have been meeting with community leaders and legislators across Maryland, particularly in connection with underserved communities, to discuss incidents of sexual assault, complex problems facing survivors, and the potential benefits of self-administered sexual assault evidence collection kits. Throughout our meetings, one thing has been abundantly clear – people want access to as many resources as possible to help sexual assault survivors. We believe that providing this option to survivors is critical, and we hope to partner with healthcare stakeholders to ensure that survivors are able to find and use this tool in a way that is responsible and compliant with applicable rules and regulations.

We believe it’s critical to have self-administered sexual assault evidence collection kits available at public access points, including hospitals, colleges and universities, and non-profit centers, and we are working to ensure that can happen under the current law.

To be clear, we understand the value of encouraging survivors of sexual assault to report these incidents through the established formal processes, including forensic care in hospitals and reporting to law enforcement. Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that many survivors will never report sexual assaults to the authorities. It is within this space that Leda Health firmly believes our test kits provide the most benefit to survivors and the community.

At Leda Health, we are deeply invested in supporting survivors of sexual assault including the loved ones of those impacted and their communities. We are encouraged that various states, including Maryland, are assessing the value and benefits of self-administered kits so that, together, we can ensure that survivors have as many resources as possible to pursue self-validation and clarity in a way that respects their individual needs.

Sincerely,

Sean Bogle

Sean Bogle, COO of Leda Health