



POSITION: **STRONG SUPPORT FOR SB848** - Public Health Abortion Grant Program - Establishment

TO: Maryland Senate Finance and Budget & Taxation Committees

FROM: Mountain Maryland Alliance for Reproductive Freedom (MMARF)
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This is written testimony in support of SB848 from the Mountain Maryland Alliance for Reproductive Freedom (MMARF), a collaborative of members from Garrett and Allegany Counties.

There seems to be an erroneous belief that the citizens of the state's western-most counties are staunchly against abortion. It is a statement that you may have heard from some of our elected officials. True, this past election Garrett County was the only county in the state that voted against Question 1, adding reproductive rights to the Maryland State Constitution, however, the vote was 46% in favor of the amendment, an 83% increase in the pro-choice vote in Garrett County from the 1992 state referendum on abortion. On Question 1, the majority of Allegany County voters approved the amendment.

Despite our growing support for reproductive freedom and choice, we remain a highly conservative part of the state. You may be wondering why SB848 is so important to Mountain Maryland. There are 3 main reasons we would like to put forward.

First, we need accurate information on abortion and other reproductive healthcare options. The discussion around Question 1 in the last election was negatively influenced by disinformation aggressively put out by anti-abortion radicals. MMARF has been involved in numerous efforts to get fact-based information about reproductive rights to our community members, especially young adults who struggle to get accurate information on all of their reproductive options. Yet, the disinformation campaign about abortion and reproductive health options continues.

Secondly, Mountain Maryland has some of the highest poverty rates in the state, with Allegany County being the second highest with a median household income of \$49,449 (43.2% below state average) and Garrett County being the fifth highest with a median household income of \$54,542 (37.4% below state average).

And third, until a year and a half ago, Mountain Maryland was also an abortion care desert, with the nearest providers being located several hours away in Charleston, WV, and Hagerstown, MD. Pregnant people in both Mountain Maryland counties were often referred by their doctors and community service professionals to the Crisis Pregnancy Centers located here. As you all are aware, CPCs are not healthcare providers and are not providers of neutral, accurate, fact-based information about reproductive options. But, in the absence of appropriate care, for desperate women it was often the only option regardless of their health, their religious affiliation, and their socio-economic status. That changed in June 2023 when the Women's Health Center of Maryland opened its doors in Cresaptown, MD, just outside of Cumberland.

Maryland, particularly Mountain Maryland, has benefitted ever since by having the first healthcare facility to offer the full range of factual, compassionate, quality reproductive healthcare services including medication and procedural abortions. Mountain Marylanders seeking these kinds of services now have a place to go. We desperately need to keep the clinic doors opened.

As an independent clinic in an impoverished area of the state with many out-of-state residents seeking abortion services, the Women's Health Center of Maryland relies heavily on grants from abortion funds across the country. These funds received a wealth of donations immediately after Dobbs, but donations have drastically been reduced due to the uncertainty in the country's political environment and the economic challenges faced by so many. As a result, abortion funds have had to significantly reduce funding for direct patient care. This places an overwhelming financial strain on independent, nonprofit clinics that operate without substantial resources or widespread name recognition, leaving their financial margins razor thin. Despite these challenges, the Women's Health Center of Maryland is committed to ensuring that no patient is turned away, keeping costs as low as possible to serve our most marginalized community members, and has pledged to seek donations to increase funding for patient care by 15% more compared to the same period last year. This level of support is unsustainable without additional resources.

For these reasons, SB848 and the Public Health Abortion Grant Program is critical to Mountain Maryland. Redirecting state funds from insurance providers to abortion providers – at no expense to taxpayers – would directly support patient care, alleviating the financial burden on our clinic and ensuring access to essential services for those who need them most, especially in Garrett and Allegany Counties.

The Board of Directors and the members of Mountain Maryland Alliance for Reproductive Freedom urge this Committee to vote favorably on SB848.

Thank you.