

March 3, 2025

Senator Pamela Beidle, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Maryland General Assembly
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Testimony of Baltimore Abortion Fund
In Support of S.B. 848: Public Health Abortion Grant Program - Establishment**

Dear Chair Beidle and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee Committee:

The Baltimore Abortion Fund (BAF) submits this testimony in strong support of S.B. 848, which would establish a public health abortion grant program to increase access to abortions in Maryland. The Baltimore Abortion Fund is a community-based nonprofit organization that helps people pay for their abortions and supports individuals to overcome the obstacles that make it challenging, if not impossible, for so many people to get the abortions they need. That includes paying for the cost of abortion, travel, childcare, and more. Every year, BAF supports hundreds of Maryland residents from all twenty-three counties and Baltimore City, as well as hundreds of people who are forced to travel to Maryland for care due to extreme abortion bans and restrictions. This committee has an opportunity to pass this first-of-its-kind legislation and lead the nation in better supporting abortion funds, providers, and people seeking care.

The reality is that even before the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which overturned *Roe v. Wade* and the constitutional right to abortion, state abortion bans and restrictions, alongside long-standing systemic barriers to care, have made it difficult, if not impossible, for countless people to get abortions. To add insult to injury, the Hyde Amendment prohibits federal funding from being used for abortion care except in narrow circumstances, creating a severe gap in access – even here in Maryland.

Following the rise in increasingly hostile abortion bans and restrictions in the wake of the *Dobbs* decision, both demand and costs for care have skyrocketed. At BAF, requests for assistance have continued to increase dramatically each year, rising from 10,000 inbound calls in 2023 to 15,000 in 2024. This surge includes both Maryland residents—who make

up about two-thirds of those we serve—and an increasing number of out-of-state clients receiving care in Maryland.

Due to severe funding limitations, the BAF helpline operates on a fixed weekly budget to ensure that financial assistance is available year-round. Last year, BAF was forced to drastically reduce its hours as the demand for assistance far outpaced available resources. BAF's helpline is now open just 12 hours a week, Monday through Thursday. Many requests are left unanswered once available funds are depleted, leaving hundreds of Maryland residents and patients with few, if any, alternatives.

Available funds are often exhausted within 24-48 hours. At this current level of resourcing, BAF can only cover a fraction of the support needed for Maryland residents and patients. Last year, BAF clients faced unaffordable procedure costs totaling over \$6.7 million, of which BAF was able to provide just \$850,000 of financial assistance. That total does not include the logistical costs of accessing healthcare, nor does it include hundreds of requests that went unanswered.

Though the need has increased exponentially, resources have not kept pace with demand. Our statewide network of abortion funds, clinics, and providers that facilitate access to abortion is being pushed to the brink. We cannot emphasize enough how vital it is that abortion clinics and abortion funds, like ours, are adequately resourced. It is often the difference between someone getting the care they need and being forced to remain pregnant. This is why we strongly support S.B. 848.

S.B. 848 would create a **first-of-its-kind public health grant program** funded by existing and unspent premiums for abortion coverage already set aside and required to be collected by the Affordable Care Act. These funds, which would otherwise go unused, will be reinvested directly to abortion funds and abortion clinics with their own abortion funds in Maryland. BAF appreciates in particular that these funds can be used whether or not someone has insurance - meaning these funds are available if someone is uninsured, underinsured, or has security or privacy concerns with using their insurance coverage.

At BAF, over 10 percent of our clients who contact us for financial support have some form of insurance but can't use it because their coverage is insufficient or unusable because of Hyde-like restrictions. We also appreciate that S.B. 848 has no state residency requirement so these grants can be used to support anyone who needs them, regardless of their immigration status. Everyone deserves to get the care they need regardless of who they are, where they live, whether they have insurance, or how much money they earn, and S.B. 848 brings us closer to making that a reality.

There is currently available in Maryland an estimated \$25 million that has accumulated from unspent premiums for abortion coverage, and it is anticipated that these surplus funds will continue to accrue an additional \$3 million a year. Under this bill, BAF would be eligible to receive funding. This immense influx of support would enable us to more

effectively meet skyrocketing demand and costs and begin to address severe gaps in access.

Right now, the average client needs \$3,400 to pay for the cost of their abortion, which is particularly concerning when you consider that most Americans cannot afford an unplanned expense of \$1,000. This does not include the costs of practical support such as childcare, gas, or airfare. While the funds from S.B. 848 can only be used to provide abortion services, BAF could help thousands more people with the cost of care and stretch its existing budget even further to provide the wrap-around practical support that so many people need.

S.B. 848 is also responsive to the increased risks and threats of criminalization faced by abortion providers, abortion funds like us, other supporters, and people who get abortions. Given the legal and political landscape and the increased risk, it is more essential than ever to protect people's private health information from misuse and unnecessary disclosure. We appreciate that S.B. 848 recognizes this and prohibits the release, publication, or disclosure of any identifying information about staff at organizations that receive grants, health care providers who provide care, or people who request or obtain support from abortion funds.

Finally, last year, Marylanders enshrined the right to abortion in the state constitution, a critical first step to ensure Maryland remains a state that is ready, willing, and able to continue supporting abortion seekers both within our communities and beyond. But a right in name is not enough. Maryland must make the right a reality by ensuring people, especially those who are low-income, uninsured, or underinsured, can get the care they need. We urge the Committee to return a favorable report on S.B. 848.

If you have any questions or need additional information from BAF, please do not hesitate to contact us at info@baltimoreabortionfund.org.

Sincerely,



Lynn McCann-Yeh and Porsha Pinder
Co-Executive Directors
Baltimore Abortion Fund