

BILL NO: Senate Bill 0848
TITLE: Public Health Abortion Grant Program – Establishment
COMMITTEE: Finance and Budget and Taxation
HEARING DATE: March 06, 2025
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is dedicated to ensuring the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women throughout the state. We urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 0848's establishment of the Public Health Abortion Grant Program and maintain that unfettered **access** to the necessary healthcare for reproductive autonomy is grounded in the life, liberty, and equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Drivers of inequity such as income and health insurance disparities must not be allowed to create barriers to what Maryland voters have codified in our state constitution as a fundamental human right. There is no public grant funding for abortion in the United States. This bill will create a ground-breaking, first-in-the-nation program to secure access to that right.

SB 0848 is remarkable in that the proposed grant program will not cost Maryland taxpayers a dime; instead, the Maryland Department of Health will simply reimburse providers through surplus insurance premiums earmarked for abortion care by the Affordable Care Act. Maryland carriers have approximately \$25 million of these earmarked funds sitting, untouched, and growing by over \$3 million a year, while people who are uninsured, underinsured, or limited by travel and wrap around services are unable to access their right to abortion.

Nonprofit abortion funds have long shouldered these gaps in coverage, but we cannot and should not rely on private philanthropy to underwrite Maryland's commitments to human rights. Every nonprofit in the country is currently facing existential crises due to funding cuts and diminished donations, and this is particularly true in Maryland as an unprecedented number of our neighbors and institutions have been negatively impacted by recent presidential actions. This vulnerability is exactly why we voted to enshrine reproductive freedom in our constitution and ensure the bodily autonomy of Marylanders is not infringed upon due to federal headwinds attacking reproductive rights.

Government control of reproductive capacity has long persisted as a tool to subordinate women, people of color, people living on lower incomes and other disfavored groups. As a result of federal funding prohibitions, abortion care continues to be jeopardized and therefore Maryland, once again, has the opportunity to lead the nation with our commitment to the fundamental right of reproductive freedom. The funds for the proposed Public Health Abortion Grant Program **are already available and not being utilized.** For all these reasons, the Women's Law Center implores our representatives to support SB 0848 and ensure that everyone – no matter their circumstances – can exercise their basic human rights.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.