
TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HOUSE BILL 1271

Health - Abortion - Ultrasound and Wait Time

Health and Government Operations

February 27, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly opposes HB1271, which will restrict the freedom of pregnant people seeking an abortion – imposing both additional barriers and a waiting period prior to accessing health services. The bill would require any pregnant individual seeking an abortion to first have ultrasound imaging done, with the option of being able to see the fetus, receive a copy of the ultrasound image of the fetus, and hear the fetal heartbeat before then being required to wait 24 hours before receiving abortion care, or 2 hours if the individual has travelled at least 100 miles in order to receive the care. There is no evidence that ultrasounds prior to abortions impact an individual's decision to pursue the procedure or that an ultrasound is even medically necessary prior to an abortion in the first trimester; however, the required delay would create unnecessary health risks for the individual seeking the abortion and negatively impact Maryland's position as a reproductive safe haven, which was overwhelmingly supported by Maryland voters in 2024.¹

There is no clear evidence that mandatory ultrasounds result in an individual electing to continue their pregnancy, and ultrasounds are not medically necessary for first-trimester abortions. While some studies have shown that mandatory waiting periods between ultrasounds or counseling and abortion procedures may decrease the number of abortions that take place, they also suggest that this is a result of limited resources such as time and money, not a change in desire.² In addition, there is no medical reason for an ultrasound to be performed before a first-trimester abortion.³ Requiring an individual to get an ultrasound in order to pursue abortion services, even if they are not required to look at the imaging, exists only to guilt and shame the individual into continuing the pregnancy, with the World Health Organization even stating that the requirement "demean[s] women as competent decision-makers."² The requirement also adds to the overall cost of the procedure, increasing the financial burden faced by individuals seeking an abortion.³

¹ Maryland State Board of Elections (December 5, 2024). Official 2024 Presidential General Election Results for Question 1.

https://elections.maryland.gov/elections/2024/General_Results/gen_gresults_2024_1.html

² de Londras, F., Cleeve, A., Rodriguez, M.I., Farrell, A., Furgalska, M., and Lavelanet, A. (2022). The impact of mandatory waiting periods on abortion-related outcomes: a synthesis of legal and health evidence. *BMC Public Health*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13620-z>

³ Guttmacher Institute. (2022). *State laws and policies: Requirements for ultrasound*. <https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/requirements-ultrasound>

Delaying abortions creates unnecessary medical risks for the individuals seeking them. The actual act of inducing abortion is incredibly safe;⁴ however, delaying abortion is associated with an increase in complications. Fewer than 0.3 of every 100,000 abortions performed prior to or at eight weeks result in death, but that number increases to 6.7 abortions when performed at eighteen weeks or later.⁴ This is because abortions after the first trimester come with additional risks as the procedure itself becomes more complicated.⁵ Studies have also shown that delayed abortions negatively impact mental health.⁶ In contrast, almost all individuals report being content with their decision to have an abortion when asked five years later.⁴

Mandatory wait times negatively impact Maryland's position as a reproductive safe haven. Mandatory waiting periods create unnecessary stress for those seeking abortions, including increased costs and scheduling difficulties.⁷ While HB1271 would only require a two-hour waiting period for individuals who travel over 100 miles to seek abortion care, it nonetheless impedes on an individual's right to receive reproductive health care, and, in turn, negatively impact's Maryland's position as a safe haven for reproductive rights.

Less than four months ago, Maryland voters overwhelmingly – by more than a 50 point margin - approved Question 1, amending Maryland's Constitution confirming “an individual's fundamental right to reproductive freedom, including but not limited to the ability to make and effectuate decisions to prevent, continue, or end the individual's pregnancy, and provid[ing] the State may not, directly or indirectly, deny, burden, or abridge, the right unless justified by a compelling State interest achieved by the least restrictive means.”¹ **The Maryland General Assembly should not disregard the will of Maryland voters, nor the rights and freedoms the voters have affirmed.**

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges an unfavorable report on HB1271.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

⁴ The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (n.d.). *Abortion access fact sheet*.

<https://www.acog.org/advocacy/abortion-is-essential/come-prepared/abortion-access-fact-sheet>

⁵ Ungar, L. (2023). It's taking longer to get an abortion in the US. Doctors fear riskier, more complex procedures. *The Associated Press*. <https://apnews.com/article/abortion-care-wait-times-us-roe-dobbs-7b0a328bb34b0acb3d37e359a63712fc>

⁶ Wasser, O., Ralph, L. J., Kaller, S., & Biggs, M. A. (2024). Experiences of delay-causing obstacles and mental health at the time of abortion seeking. *Contraception: X*, 6, 100105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.conx.2024.100105>

⁷ Guttmacher Institute. (2025). *State laws and policies: Counseling and waiting period requirements for abortion*. <https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/counseling-and-waiting-periods-abortion>