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Testimony on HB0930 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Public Health Abortion Grant Program - Establishment

TO: Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

My name is Andrew Miller. I am a resident of District 11B, Chair of the Social Justice Advocacy Committee at Chizuk Amuno Congregation in Stevenson, MD, and Chair of the Synagogue Social Justice Roundtable, which has representatives from synagogue communities in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0930.

Judaism teaches that life begins at birth, not at conception. The imposition of religion-specific beliefs creating legal requirements on the general population is a violation of the religious freedoms protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. My wife and I, along with others in the Jewish community, have spent time in the past year as clinic escorts at the Planned Parenthood clinic in downtown Baltimore, which provides much more than abortion care; it provides essential health care to many, and especially to those who do not have the financial means to cover those costs.

We have seen how draconian laws in other states have led to health emergencies affecting women who were refused treatment in cases where pregnancies that were not viable, and even miscarriages, threatened the life of the mother. In at least one or two documented cases this refusal of treatment led to the death of the person who was seeking treatment. The risks are borne disproportionately, although not only, by the poor and by people of color. This is barbaric and should never happen to anyone in any country.

This is why, working in partnership with Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women, Jews United for Justice, and many cosponsoring synagogues and Jewish organizations, we organized and hosted a program last September titled “The Maryland Right to Reproductive Freedom Amendment – Why Does It Matter to the Jewish Community?” We helped to recruit others and spent time canvassing and working at the polls on election day to secure the passage of Question 1 on the Maryland ballot, which passed with a majority of more than 75%.

Because Maryland is now recognized as being in the vanguard in protecting reproductive rights and maternal health, many people are coming here from other states where those protections have been abridged. As a result, medical providers are scrambling to meet the demand. They need help.

Fortuitously, there is a little-known provision in the Affordable Care Act (Section 1303) that requires states to set aside separate funds in addition to those provided by insurance under the ACA, in states that require that medical insurance policies cover abortion. Those funds have been set aside every year since the ACA was passed and are sitting in an account for reimbursement of abortion care providers and nonprofits that support reproductive health care. That money, which now amounts to approximately \$25 million accumulated since 2014, cannot be used for anything else. As long as the ACA remains in effect, surplus funds are expected to provide an additional \$3 million per year.

HB0930 creates a mechanism that makes funds in this account available for their intended purpose. The bill will create a public health grant program to support equitable access to abortion care in Maryland. It will provide support for abortion care to people who are uninsured and underinsured and will be managed by the Department of Health, just like all other public health grant programs. This is a rare opportunity for the State to provide an essential benefit to those most in need without tapping other State funds. Maryland will be the first state in the country to establish such a program and we hope that other states will soon follow our example.

For these reasons, I **urge the committee to provide a favorable report on HB0930.**