

**Committee:** Government, Labor, and Elections

**Bill Number:** House Bill 356 - Human Relations - Protection of the Free Exercise of Religion

**Hearing Date:** February 17, 2026

**Position:** Oppose

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Planned Parenthood of Maryland (PPM) has grave concerns about possible unintended consequences of *House Bill 356 - Human Relations - Protection of the Free Exercise of Religion*. The stated intent of this bill is to promote religious freedom. However, we at Planned Parenthood of Maryland believe it may cause harm to marginalized communities and inadvertently subject them to blatant discrimination.

Planned Parenthood of Maryland is aware of existing state and federal laws which protect the right to religious freedom. HB 356 could open the floodgates to discrimination masquerading as freedom and detract from the societal progress our nation and state have made since the nation first adopted the notion of separation between church and state. This could be manifested in a plethora of ways – including but not limited to employers taking adverse action against employees based on contraception practices, assumptions about having accessed an abortion or gender affirming care. It could be seen to even allow businesses to deny services, such as shelters and foster care agencies, to certain groups.

In addition to possibly undermining current civil rights laws and anti-discriminatory practices, HB 356 would allow for civil litigation cases against the State of Maryland, leading to lawsuits that will exhaust taxpayer funds and time. Furthermore – the State of Maryland already has robust statutes in place to protect the right to practice religion.

We ask for an unfavorable report. Marylanders are already protected to exercise their religion – this bill serves to create an unnecessary loophole to discrimination which goes against the fabric of both our nation and state. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Vice President of Public Affairs, Erin Bradley, at [erin.bradley@ppm.care](mailto:erin.bradley@ppm.care).