

# Keeping Women in the Dark Is Not Empowerment



Maryland's abortion debate is deeply polarized. On one side, abortion is framed as an untouchable right. On the other hand, it is opposed as a grave moral wrong. In that environment, agreement can seem impossible.

But there is still one place where Maryland lawmakers should be able to come together: women deserve honest information, meaningful informed consent, and accurate public health data.

Three bills before the Maryland House point in that direction. HB 714 would require abortion data to be submitted to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HB 1281 would require an ultrasound and a waiting period before an abortion. HB 1401 would strengthen informed consent requirements. These proposals do not resolve every argument about abortion, nor do they pretend to. They do something more basic. They recognize that women should not be kept in the dark when facing one of the most serious decisions of their lives.

That should not be controversial.

Knowledge is powerful. Keeping people in the dark is controlling.

A woman facing an unexpected pregnancy deserves more than slogans, pressure, or a rushed process. She deserves facts. She deserves time to think. She deserves the opportunity to

understand what is happening in her body and what procedure is being proposed. She deserves a health care system that treats her as a person with dignity, not as someone to be moved quickly from fear to consent.

That is what a human dignity approach requires.

Human dignity means every person has inherent worth. It means people should be treated as moral agents, capable of reflection, reason, and decision-making. It means the role of law and medicine is not to obscure reality but to ensure that important choices are made with full knowledge and genuine consent.

That principle should apply in every area of health care. It should apply here, too.

Informed consent is not a barrier to care; it is a safeguard. In nearly every other medical context, patients are told the nature of a procedure, its risks, and the alternatives available to them. No one calls that oppression. No one argues that informed patients are less free. We understand that good medicine requires honesty.

Abortion should not be the one area of medicine where less information is celebrated as progress.

HB 1281 and HB 1401 are grounded in a simple belief: women are strong enough to handle the truth and worthy enough to receive it. An ultrasound requirement and a waiting period acknowledge the seriousness of abortion and create space for reflection. Informed consent requirements ensure that the decision is not reduced to a signature on a form but is rooted in real understanding.

Even those who support legal abortion should be able to support that standard. If we say we trust women, then we should trust them with information. If we claim to care about women's health, then we should not fear transparency.

HB 714 addresses another serious concern: Maryland's lack of abortion reporting to the CDC. If the state refuses to gather and report standard abortion data, it becomes harder to understand the impact of abortion on women, families, and communities. It becomes harder to identify trends, assess outcomes, or craft policy that responds to reality.

That is not good for women. It is not good for medicine. It is not good for public trust.

You cannot measure impact if you refuse to measure reality.

For years, much of the abortion debate has been shaped by a false choice: either you support women, or you support protections around abortion. But that framing collapses under scrutiny. A society committed to human dignity should be able to do both. It should be able to care about women's autonomy while also insisting on informed consent. It should be able to defend legal rights while also demanding transparency, accountability, and better data.

Maryland lawmakers do not have to agree on everything about abortion to agree on this much; women deserve the truth. Women deserve information before a decision, not after the decision is made. They deserve public health honesty, not statistical silence. They deserve a standard of care that respects their intelligence, conscience, and humanity.

With these bills, Maryland has a chance to choose dignity over darkness. It should.

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