
BILL NO: House Bill 834
TITLE: Public Health – Federal and State Funding for Abortions – Prohibition and Exceptions
COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations
HEARING DATE: February 17, 2021
POSITION: **OPPOSE**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a statewide, non-profit law firm that provides direct legal representation to survivors of domestic violence and advocates legislatively on issues related to the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Part of that advocacy includes supporting women in their reproductive choices so that they are able to build their families how and when they want and ensuring that women's reproductive health care is treated equitably and fairly as a medical issue and not a political one. We strongly oppose House Bill 834.

Under current law, federal funds are prohibited from being used for abortion except in cases of life endangerment, rape, or incest. State funds may be used to pay for abortions in certain circumstances in addition to those already permitted under federal law, including if a physician determines the continuation of the pregnancy is necessary to prevent serious or adverse effects on the woman's present or future physical or mental health. House Bill 834 would remove the State's ability to use state funds for any circumstances other than when 1) the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest or 2) the woman has a life-endangering physical condition resulting from the pregnancy that would place her in danger of death unless an abortion is performed.

The Women's Law Center opposes HB 834 because it imposes undue burdens on a woman's right to access abortion, disregarding the bodily and intellectual autonomy of women. It places limitations on women who lack the financial means to access the medical care they deserve, thereby widening the already enormous gap of health care disparities based on economic status. Decisions such as when and how to obtain an abortion should not be governed by politics or purse strings. Furthermore, this legislation gives little consideration to individual patients' medical circumstances. Just because a medical condition does not rise to the level of impending death does not mean that a woman should have no options available to her, yet this legislation ignores the myriad of mental and health conditions that she may be facing. Again, these are decisions best left between a patient and their physician, not the legislature.

The Women's Law Center strongly believes that reproductive choice is essential for the health and well-being of women in Maryland. For these reasons, the Women's Law Center urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 834.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, membership organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change. The Women's Law Center operates two hotlines, Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County, the Collateral Legal Assistance for Survivors project, and the Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project.