
BILL NO: House Bill 1139
TITLE: Public Funds – Prohibition on Expenditures for Abortion
COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations
HEARING DATE: March 11, 2022
POSITION: **OPPOSE**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a statewide, non-profit legal service organization 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 1139, a broadly sweeping bill that seeks to control multiple aspects of abortion or anything touching on abortion, such as legitimate medical research.

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 discontinuation of the pregnancy is necessary to prevent serious or adverse effects on the woman's present or future physical or mental health. House Bill 1139 would remove the State's ability to use state funds for any circumstances other than when 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. There is no provision for when the mother's mental health is at risk.

In addition, the bill would prevent any expenditure by any state agency, including state schools, from spending any funds on abortion or anything related to abortion, including legitimate medical research. It also seeks to prevent lawyers from representing clients who have issues related to abortion if they use a trust fund. This is violative of any first amendment rights of lawyers and litigants, and is outlandish at best. It includes "findings" that fly in the face of reality, such as a "finding" that restricting abortion funding does not impose a governmental obstacle for women seeking abortion care. That is the entire goal of the bill.

The Women's Law Center opposes HB 1139 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. Again, these are decisions best left between a patient and their physician, not the legislature. It would severely upend the provision of medical care in Maryland due to constraints placed on insurers and providers who do provide abortion care.

The Women's Law Center strongly believes that reproductive choice is essential for the health and well-being of women of every economic strata in Maryland.

We therefore urge an unfavorable vote on HB 1139.

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.