

HB1111/SB969

Public Health - Access to Emergency Contraception – Student Health Centers and Vending Machines

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24/7 Access to Emergency Contraception on Maryland College Campuses

Emergency Contraception (EC), also known as the "morning after pill," is a large dose of oral contraception (progesterone) that helps prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse or birth control failure. EC works by preventing or delaying ovulation. It does not affect an existing pregnancy. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved one-pill EC products, like Plan B®, for over-the-counter sale in 2013.¹

Why does access to EC on college campuses matter?

One-pill EC is most effective if it is taken within 72 hours of intercourse and is 50% more effective within the first 12 hours.² Considering the impact of time on EC's efficacy, 24/7 access to EC is crucial in preventing pregnancy. However, many college health centers make quick access to EC difficult by being closed on nights and weekends, requiring appointments, or not stocking the product at all.

At Maryland colleges and universities, students may face delays in securing EC due to not only having to schedule required health center appointments, but also being charged appointment fees. For example, at Towson University, a student may be charged an appointment fee of \$65 and then an additional \$25 for EC. The cost of over-the-counter EC purchased at a pharmacy runs between \$43 to \$50. While seeking EC at a local pharmacy may seem like a reasonable alternative to visiting a student health center, many college students cannot access these off-campus pharmacies without reliable transportation. Even if a student is able to locate a pharmacy, many Maryland stores place unnecessary age restrictions on purchasing EC or stock it behind the pharmacy counter or sales counter, even though it is an over-the-counter medication, making it difficult for consumers to know whether the store stocks it at all. A 2017 NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland Fund study found that approximately 36% of pharmacies place age requirements for purchase and approximately 46% kept the products behind a counter.³ Independently owned pharmacies were less likely to stock EC at all.

HB1111/SB969 would improve access to over-the-counter emergency contraception (EC) at public institutions of higher education that have on-campus housing for students by:

- Requiring student health centers to stock EC, and offering students contraceptive counseling or referrals to qualified health care providers during normal health center hours
- Ensuring 24/7 availability of EC on their campuses through vending machines or other methods, as an alternative to the health centers which are not open 24/7 – this bill does not require college health centers to be open 24/7 or that vending machines must be the only option
- Requiring posted information on the school website and other communication modes about the availability of EC on- and off-campus
- Providing consumer-friendly information on the effective use of EC

Through these actions, HB1111/SB969 ensures that students have the opportunity to access EC on-campus in a way that is fast, convenient, and sensitive to the real-life needs of students.

¹ Castillo, M. (2013, June 20). FDA approves over-the-counter sales of Plan B One-Step for all ages. *CBS News*.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fda-approves-over-the-counter-sales-of-plan-b-one-step-for-all-ages/>

² Piaggio, G., Kapp, N., & von Hertzen, H. (2011). Effect on pregnancy rates of the delay in the administration of levonorgestrel for emergency contraception: a combined analysis of four WHO trials. *Contraception*, 84(1), 35-39.

³ Banks, A., Johnson, A., & Philip, D. (2017, July). What's Your Plan C When You Can't Get Plan B? Maryland, USA: NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland Fund. <http://www.prochoicemd.org/assets/bin/pdfs/NPCMF%20EC%20Report.pdf>

Compliance with HB111/S969: Methods to ensure 24/7 availability of EC

Schools may comply with HB111/SB969 in a variety of cost-effective ways. As the bill does not require colleges and universities to keep their student health centers open for additional hours, EC may be made available to students in other areas on campus. For example, effective fall 2017 University of Maryland College Park has already ensured 24/7 access to EC by stocking it at the university's 24/7 convenience store for \$15 each.⁴ Other public colleges and universities can follow this example, or make it available at another 24/7 staffed area where students can purchase it 24/7, like in a student union or library. If a school does not have a 24/7 staffed area, stocking EC in a vending machine in a 24/7 accessible building may be an easier option⁵ – one that some College Park students report they prefer to purchasing EC at the peer-staffed convenience store.

Proven Method: Vending Machines Dispensation for 24/7 Access

As of February 2018, seven colleges and universities in the U.S. have achieved 24/7 access to EC through stocking the over-the-counter medication in a vending machine on-campus. What have we learned?

- Colleges and universities that sell EC in on-campus vending machines are able to offer it \$20-\$30 cheaper (on average) than pharmacies in the area. This discounted price makes EC significantly more accessible to college students who often have little to no income.
- Stocking "wellness machines" with EC alongside first-aid and feminine hygiene products, condoms, and other over-the-counter medications such as Advil, offers students privacy and discretion.⁶
- While EC can be stocked in a pre-existing machine, the estimated cost of creating a new vending machine on campus is roughly \$3,000. This cost is easily offset, as schools often buy EC at a bulk price of about \$10 to 12/box, and sell at \$15 to \$20/box, creating a small profit with each purchase.
- Students will use the products. After installing a vending machine outside of the student health center in 2015, Pomona College reported having dispensed over 250 EC packets from the health center with an additional 805 sold from the vending machine in its first year.



For these reasons, we urge support for HB111/SB969

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⁴ Fortson, N. (2017, October 20). After Trump nixed birth control mandate, UMD town hall discusses options for students. *The Diamondback*. <http://www.dbknews.com/2017/10/20/umd-birth-control-health-center-town-hall/>

⁵ Culp-Ressler, T. (2013, January 29). FDA allows college campus to make contraception more accessible with Plan B vending machine. *Think Progress*. <https://thinkprogress.org/fda-allows-college-campus-to-make-contraception-more-accessible-with-plan-b-vending-machine-deb8a820ffe3/#.I9knsvl7z>

⁶ Caron, C. (2017, September 28). Student look to vending machines for better access to morning-after pill. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/28/us/plan-b-vending-machine.html?mtrref=undefined>