



**SB0657 – Pilot Program – Alleged Rape, Sexual Offense, or Child Sexual Abuse
– HIV Postexposure Prophylaxis**

Presented to the Hon. Bobby Zirkin and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.
February 22, 2019, 9:00 a.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee a favorable report on SB0657, Pilot Program – Alleged Rape, Sexual Offense, or Child Sexual Abuse – HIV Postexposure Prophylaxis, sponsored by Senator Nancy King.**

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. We strive to protect individuals' rights to justice in situations of sexual harm or abuse, as we believe this is a fundamental reproductive rights issue—survivors of sexual violence have the right to comprehensive treatment to prevent disease and ensure their health.

Sexual violence is an epidemic. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, one in five women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives, and one in three women and one in six men experienced some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetime. Further, one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old—in fact, 30% of women were between the ages of 11 and 17 at the time of their first completed rape.¹ This violence is pervasive and impactful.

Rape and assault can impact not only victims' mental wellbeing, but can also result in serious physical damage, including, commonly, HIV. According to the World Health Organization, adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection because their vaginal mucous membranes have not yet acquired the cellular density that provide an effective barrier to the infection².

Survivors of sexual violence need access to life-saving Postexposure Prophylaxis. SB0657 increases health equity in Maryland by ensuring that every survivor can access this treatment. Some individuals may not feel safe using their health insurance to cover the cost of the treatment—if their partner is abusive, receiving Prophylaxis could anger their partner and endanger the survivor further. As victims know their perpetrators in 8 out of 10 cases, the likelihood of individuals needing to keep their treatment secret is significant. Further, every individual has a right to treatment, regardless of financial situation or insurance status. So, even if survivors lack insurance coverage, SB0657 ensures that those individuals are not discriminated against.

Without this bill, low income survivors who cannot afford Prophylaxis will not be able to access it, and will face a higher risk of HIV infection.

We strongly support this effort to allow all survivors access to life-saving Postexposure Prophylaxis. This treatment is critical for the life and wellbeing of sexual violence survivors, and this bill guarantees that all survivors access this treatment, regardless of socioeconomic status. For these reasons, **NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable report on SB0657.** Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Get Statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.nsvrc.org/statistics>

² Sexual Violence and HIV. (2010, December 01). Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/svri/issues/hiv/en/>