



HB0681 – State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health – School-Based Health Centers – Ombudsmen

Presented to Hon. Shane E. Pendergrass and
Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 7, 2019 1:00 pm

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the Health and Government Operations Committee a favorable report on HB0681** – State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health – School-Based Health Centers – Ombudsmen, sponsored by Delegate Bonnie Cullison. It is essential for the continued support, expansion, and success of school-based health centers, that personnel have adequate representation and coordination between the centers and the Maryland State Department of Education and Department of Health.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As such, we support programs and institutions aimed at providing individuals with the knowledge and power they need to make more informed healthcare decisions, such as school-based health centers (SBHCs). As such, it is essential to continue providing the resources and personnel needed for the functioning and success of these spaces. School-based health centers have become an increasingly important source of sexual and reproductive healthcare for youth across the state, particularly where it is difficult for low-income families and disenfranchised youth to access such services.¹ To improve health and education outcomes, students who are sexually active or thinking of becoming sexually active should have access to proper services so they can make informed health and wellness decisions. This is only achievable, however, if there are supports and resources in place for such facilities.

HB0681 mandates that the State Superintendent of Schools and the Secretary of Health to each designate an ombudsman for school-based health centers. The ombudsmen will then serve as a point of contact, provide technical assistance, as well as contact and coordination between these departments to build a robust network of SBHCs across Maryland. This position serves to all SBHCs and may increase access and availability for students seeking healthcare as connecting SBHCs to one another and providing important information allows for more staff to be aware of all healthcare resources for students.

We believe that our public high school students want and deserve more healthcare support so they may be able to realize important education and life-affirming goals. HB0681 seeks to expand and create more opportunities to positively impact adolescent health by supporting and growing the facilities that assist students. We are hopeful that this measure will also result in opening more SBHCs in our high schools, as well as middle schools. **For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable committee report on HB0681.**

¹ For more information about the importance of SBHCs in improving both healthcare and education outcomes, see our report “Could We Do More? The Argument for Inclusive Sexual and reproductive Healthcare in Maryland School-Based Health Centers” September 2018 <https://maryland.prochoiceamericaaffiliates.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2018/10/SBHC-Policy-dr12.pdf>