



**HB0768 – Health Prescription Drug Affordability Board**  
Presented to the Hon. Shane Pendergrass and  
Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee  
March 6, 2019 at 1:00 p.m.

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POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee a favorable report on HB0768** – Health Prescription Drug Affordability Board, sponsored by Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk. It is essential to continue supporting funding and access to prescription drugs for all Marylanders.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. A critical component of our mission is to work towards ensuring that all Marylanders have access to the health care that they need. In the United States, prescription drugs are climbing at an alarming rate, making it difficult for many individuals in our state to get the medicine that they need. This includes the rising costs of prescription contraceptives.

In our country, prescription drug expenditures account for nearly 20 percent of health care costs, according to the Campaign for Sustainable Rx Pricing. In 2014, spending on prescription drugs increased 13.1 percent, which is the largest annual increase since 2003. Many of these cost increases are seen in the most common medicines – since 2011, four of the top ten prescription drugs in our nation have increased in price by at least 100 percent. These skyrocketing costs burden not only the government, but, more importantly, patients and healthcare providers<sup>1</sup>.

One in four Americans report that they struggle to afford their medications. This puts low-income individuals in a particularly vulnerable position, forcing them to choose between their medicine and other necessities, like groceries and rent. Low-income individuals are more likely to have poor health anyway, because of lack of access to protective factors like good health insurance, healthy food, and leisure time. High drug costs place another level of burden on low-income individuals and families. Even for those with health insurance, high drug costs drive up premiums.<sup>2</sup> Abiding by contraceptive protocols can be challenged by rising costs and frustrate family planning goals.

This bill creates fundamental protections for those impacted by these trends by establishing a Prescription Drug Affordability Board in Maryland. The board will consist of a range of experts in health care who will review and establish upper limits on drug prices. This is critical both in helping create more transparency among health insurance costs and in keeping the costs themselves down. Because prescription drugs prices are climbing at an alarming rate, it is necessary for Maryland to establish a tactical plan for keeping prices down for consumers, whose access to medicine is paramount. For these reasons, **NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable committee report on HB0768**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> The Facts about Rising Prescription Drug Costs. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://www.csrpx.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CSRxP\\_Facts-of-Rising-Rx-Prices.pdf](https://www.csrpx.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CSRxP_Facts-of-Rising-Rx-Prices.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Why Are U.S. Prescription Drug Prices So High? (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/podcast/2017/oct/why-are-us-prescription-drug-prices-so-high>