



**HB0078 - Public Health- Maryland Commission on Health Equity
(The Shirley Nathan-Pulliam Health Equity Act of 2021)**
Presented to the Hon. Shane Pendergrass and
Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee
January 26, 2021 1:30 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB0078 - Public Health- Maryland Commission on Health Equity (The Shirley Nathan-Pulliam Health Equity Act of 2021)** sponsored by Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. Establishing a state-wide policy framework based on health equity is the core foundation to eliminating disparities in reproductive health access and rights for all individuals. Promoting a multi-sectoral, collaborative approach to recognizing and addressing health disparities ensures that all Maryland citizens are equally considered in the legislative decision-making process.

Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible, and this requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty and discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to employment, fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care services.

Nationwide, Black, American Indian, and Alaskan Native women are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women, and this disparity further increases with age.¹ In 2018 the Maryland Department of Health published a report showing that Black mothers die from pregnancy or childbirth-related complications at a rate of 44.6 deaths per 100,000 live births- a rate 3.7 higher than for white mothers.² While this statistic only represents one facet of health disparities in Maryland, it nevertheless expresses the need to monitor, report, and prioritize the health disparities associated with social determinants.

This legislation will seek to address these inequities beginning at the highest level of government within our state and will encourage multisectoral collaboration in order to address the deep-rooted systemic racism and inequalities that exist within our social systems. A public health and rights-based approach in the formation of policy is essential for ensuring that all Maryland citizens have the right to the highest attainable level of health possible.

For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on HB0078**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, September 5, 2019 <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html>

² Maryland Maternal Mortality Review 2018 Annual Report <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/documents/Health-General-Article-%C2%A713-1207-2018-Annual-Report-Maryland-Maternal-Mortality-Review.pdf>