



## **HB0123 – Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021**

Presented to the Hon. Shane Pendergrass and Members of Health & Government Operations Committee  
January 27, 2021 1:30 p.m.

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### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the Health and Government Operations Committee to issue a favorable report on HB0123 – Preserve Telehealth Access Act of 2021**, sponsored by Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. We seek to make all forms of healthcare as accessible as possible, and to protect the right to basic healthcare. Healthcare access is more important now than ever due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the rise of cases and deaths in Maryland. Improved access to healthcare and healthcare coverage would not only lessen the continuing spread of COVID-19, it would help improve overall health outcomes in Maryland long after the pandemic has subsided.

Healthcare access and reproductive justice are intrinsically linked. Adverse health conditions will always more negatively affect lower-income women and people of color. For example, Black and Indigenous women often receive less medical intervention for pain management, leading to failed healing of surgical procedures or injuries<sup>i</sup>. Low socioeconomic status is also linked to such negative health outcomes as low birth weight, diabetes, depression, low life expectancy and heart attacks<sup>ii</sup>. Furthermore, in 2019 the Black maternal mortality rate was 3.7 times higher than that of white mothers in Maryland<sup>iii</sup>. These numbers are predicated on centuries-long medical malpractices and systemic racism, dating back to medical experiments performed on non-consenting Black people in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century America. Maryland residents are continuing to seek medical care for chronic illness, timely pregnancy care, primary care, and emergency visits during a global pandemic and should be able to receive health-related services and coverage in the safest means possible.

The provisions in HB0123 will accommodate healthcare needs for the general Maryland population, as well as those most vulnerable, while mitigating the spread of COVID-19. It is our job as a reproductive justice-centered organization to advocate for barrier-free healthcare access for all. Requiring patients to seek telehealth providers for their medical needs based only on what is covered by their insurance is an undue burden. That is why we support the passage of this bill, and agree that health insurance should cover telehealth appointments from any type of medical appointment and provider.

The Maryland Medical Assistance Program will also be a vital tool in providing Maryland residents with COVID-safe, chronic condition management services and tracking the care and health outcomes for recipients of the Program. It is important to collect this data in order to better understand how to serve the healthcare needs of Marylanders in the future, and to track the nature of COVID-19 while expanding accessibility to telehealth. The use of telehealth services has already proven helpful in lessening the spread of COVID-19 and should continue to be used to further mitigate the worsening conditions of the pandemic.

We are continuing to face a health crisis as a state, and provisions like those in HB0123 will ensure that the most underserved Maryland communities have accessible and affordable healthcare. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on HB0123**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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- <sup>i</sup> Ray, Keisha (2016). Inefficient pain management for black patients shows that there is a fine line between 'inhumane' and 'superhuman'. Retrieved <https://www.bioethics.net/2016/05/inefficient-pain-management-for-black-patients-shows-that-there-is-a-fine-line-between-inhumane-and-superhuman/>
- <sup>ii</sup> Keita, Gwendolyn Puryear (2014). Improving the health of low-income populations. American Psychological Association. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2014/03/itpi#:~:text=Evidence%20has%20shown%20the%20critical,and%20lower%20self-rated%20health.>
- <sup>iii</sup> Maryland Maternal Mortality Review 2018 Annual Report (2018).