

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of CB 22-110R - Investigative Hearing - Baltimore City as an Abortion Rights Protection Jurisdiction. My name is Jenny Dodson Mistry and I am the Vice President of Programs and Partnerships at the National Institute for Reproductive Health, an organization that works on the state and local levels to advance reproductive health, rights, and justice. I have worked on municipal policy in support of abortion access for nearly a decade. I am also one of the authors of NIRH's Local Reproductive Freedom Index, a report issued every two years that evaluates cities and counties on 34 unique policy indicators related to reproductive freedom. Baltimore City is included in this report, and I am pleased to report that the city received a score of three out of five stars.

Our research found that Baltimore has taken many steps in several of the categories we look at, including Funding and Coverage for Reproductive Health, Supporting Young People, Supporting Families, and Building Healthy and Just Communities, although I want to underscore that there is much more work to be done in these areas as well. However, given the focus of today's hearing to establish Baltimore City as an Abortion Rights Protection Jurisdiction, I report that Baltimore did not receive any points in the Local Index's section on "Protecting Abortion Access." The policies included in this section are: a clinic safety ordinance, regulations on the deceptive practices of anti-abortion pregnancy centers, also known as crisis pregnancy centers, local protections for abortion clinics and providers, public awareness about access to abortion care, and anti-discrimination ordinances based on reproductive health decisions in employment and housing. Baltimore City also did not receive points for funding abortion.

In the wake of the devastating Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, and the rapid succession of states taking action to ban or seriously restrict abortion, it is more important than ever for states where abortion will remain legal and accessible to shore up abortion access for their own residents and for all those who will travel to the state for care. Maryland, and Baltimore City, will in particular be crucial access points for the South.

I am so pleased to hear that the Baltimore City Council is taking seriously its responsibility as an Abortion Rights Protection Jurisdiction. This action could not come at a more crucial time. The Local Index provides an important entry point into developing new city policies, but the strongest recommendation I can make is for the city to build strong relationships with the local advocates and abortion providers who have been doing the work to expand access to abortion in Baltimore City for years. This will ensure that the responses the City develops are informed by community needs and shaped by experts in this field. NIRH is committed to providing whatever support we can in order to facilitate this relationship-building, and to support effective policymaking.

Reaffirming the city's commitment to the right to abortion is important and to be celebrated. The next steps the City Council must take will be to actively protect and expand abortion access. This will take many forms. One important local initiative that is already underway is an effort to establish a Reproductive Justice Taskforce in Baltimore City, led by RJ Inside. I strongly encourage the City to consider as a way to support the development of the Abortion Rights Jurisdiction. This Taskforce could provide the City with regular opportunities to hear from community members and experts who can provide feedback, support good reproductive rights policy, and help with implementation.

I thank the City Council for taking up this important issue and look forward to continuing to work together in the months to come.