



S.28 An act relating to access to certain legally protected health care services

House Health Care Committee

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Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care to more than 16,000 people in Vermont at seven health centers located in Burlington, Williston, St. Johnsbury, Barre, White River Junction, Rutland, and Brattleboro and virtually through our telehealth program. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, sexually transmitted infections testing and treatment, cancer screenings, abortion care, as well as a variety of limited primary care services. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of their ability to pay, and 54% of our patients have low incomes (defined as less than twice the Federal Poverty level). Last fiscal year, we provided \$1.3M in free and discounted care to our communities in Vermont.

We fully support S.28 as passed by the Senate. Vermont, thanks to the bold and innovative work of this committee, which was one of the very first in the nation to safeguard abortion and gender-affirming care. These protections are now more essential than ever. As attacks on reproductive and gender-affirming health care escalate across the country, Vermont stands as a beacon of hope—offering care, dignity, and safety to those forced to travel from states that criminalize these services. This bill is a crucial next step in ensuring that providers can continue delivering essential care without fear of legal threats or political interference. By strengthening protections, Vermont reaffirms its commitment to health care access, bodily autonomy, and the fundamental right of all people to make their own medical decisions.

Sec. 1- Address protection

In 2023, this body passed a shield law that allowed health care providers of legally protected health care to participate in the state's safe at home address confidentiality program. This allowed these health care providers to keep their private home address confidential. This section extends this protection to OPR records.

Sec. 2, 3, 7 9, 10 & 12- Updating Professional Regulation Standards



This bill broadens professional regulation standards to encompass all health care professionals. Truth in medical advertisement and counseling is foundational to the trust and well-being of our entire medical system. We trust medical professionals to provide patients with scientifically accurate information to best inform health care decisions. We are pleased to see these standards elevated for all medical professionals.

Sec. 5 & 6 Fetal Death Reporting

We support the clarification of the confidentiality regarding fetal death reporting. The guidelines on best practice regarding fetal death reporting are a topic of much discussion under this current national landscape. There is some growing evidence that any fetal death reporting is harmful and national experts like the COMS project are now recommending repealing all fetal death reporting requirements.

Sec. 7 & 8- Establishing a patient relationship via adaptive questionnaire

This provision is critical for expanding abortion access in the state and we fully support it as passed by the Senate. Medication abortion is highly safe, and the questionnaire uses best medical practices to effectively screen out individuals who may not be suitable candidates.

Section 11- Confidentiality of Prescriber Information

This section is critically important to reproductive and gender affirming care providers in this state, including PPNNE's health care providers.

As one Vermont PPNNE provider shared, "I am an abortion provider and a clinician who prescribes gender-affirming medications daily. Abortion and gender-affirming care are life-saving health care for many of our community members. I do this work because I am called to do so, however I practice knowing this makes me a target. The reality is we live in a world where abortion providers have been murdered, their partners and children are threatened, and the risk of violence entering and exiting the clinic is something we weigh each and every time we step through the doors. We are seeing increasing legal challenges to this care that is ratified and protected in the Vermont constitution; we have decided as a state that access to this care is a right. We are seeing states where abortion or gender-affirming care is illegal, reaching across their borders to prosecute providers.

As a clinician, who wants to continue to provide abortions and gender-affirming health care for our community, I implore the Vermont Legislature to remove our personal



identities from these life-saving medications including abortion prescriptions and gender-affirming prescriptions. This will help protect the providers from becoming targets of personal violence and also help prevent the attempted criminalization from other states. This body has a responsibility to shield the health care providers in Vermont from increasing attacks on this safe, legal, and vital care. Thank you."

We applaud the inclusion of gender affirming care in this provision. PPNNE agrees that this protection is critical in today's climate where trans rights and health care are under scrutiny and attack.

In providing additional safeguards for the practitioners of safe and legal reproductive health care, the bill reaffirms Vermont's commitment to defending our clinicians, and, through those protections, our commitment to ensuring all Vermonters can access this critical care. It also protects our state's fragile health care infrastructure, particularly important given Vermont's clinician shortage—especially in rural areas where the loss of even a single clinician could have a devastating impact on patients' ability to access care.

Thank you for your continued efforts to protect Vermonter's access to legally protected health care and for the thoughtful ways you ensure Vermont's health care providers are protected for providing this essential, legally protected health care.