



WV FREE

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Protect West Virginia's Poorest Women: Reject HB 3159

A ban on Medicaid funding of abortions would hurt the most disadvantaged women in West Virginia. Poor women, women of color, young women and rural women, who already have insufficient access to reproductive health care, would be devastated by these funding restrictions.

HB 3159 and similar bills are unconstitutional. The West Virginia Supreme Court has already ruled that denying poor and low-income women funding for abortions violates the protections afforded them by the state Constitution (established in *Women's Health Center v. Panepinto*).

Singling out abortion for exclusion from government funded health care creates a discriminatory system in which poor women do not have the same ability to make health care decisions as those with more economic resources or those who are covered by private insurance.

Compared with the average woman who has an abortion, these women are more likely to be mothers and to have larger families, more likely to suffer from chronic illnesses and more likely to have experienced violence in their lives. A disproportionate number are pregnant as a result of sexual assault.

Poor and low-income women deserve the same access to health care as those who are more fortunate. Every woman, regardless of her economic resources, should have the right to decide whether and when to have a child. Every woman should have the right to shape her own life and plan her future. Sometimes women need public support and public resources in order to exercise these rights, as well as the right to care for their children with dignity.

Simply put, such legislation would use poor women as pawns and employ the West Virginia Legislature to launch a legal battle. Proponents of these bills want to pass a bill that they know to be unconstitutional, only to engage the State in a costly, lengthy lawsuit that hurts the poorest West Virginians. The Legislature's time would be better spent supporting programs and health care measures that reduce unplanned pregnancy and the resulting need for abortion.

Please oppose this unconstitutional attack on poor women.

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