



January 5, 2023

Members of the House Health Finance and Policy Committee
Via Electronic Delivery

Re: Letter in Support of the Protect Reproductive Options Act (PRO) Act, H.F. 1

Dear Members of the Committee:

Violence Free Minnesota (VFMN) and the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA) submit this letter to express our support for the Protect Reproductive Options Act (PRO) Act, H.F. 1. We are statewide coalitions who, together, consist of over 120 member programs working to end domestic and sexual violence. Member programs provide direct services and support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence in all 87 counties in Minnesota.

We firmly believe reproductive healthcare choices, abortion access, and bodily autonomy are all fundamental human rights. Everyone should have access to safe and affordable reproductive healthcare and abortion care.

Access to safe abortions is a matter of safety for victim/survivors of intimate partner violence. We know that pregnancy can increase a person's vulnerability to intimate partner violence. Forcing someone to carry a pregnancy to term often binds them to their abuser and puts them at risk for further abuse. Victim/survivors—and all people—deserve to be safe and have access to the full spectrum of accessible and affordable reproductive healthcare, including abortion.

Domestic and sexual violence is rooted in power and control. Reproductive coercion is a form of abuse by which a current or former intimate partner maintains power and control over a victim/survivor's reproductive health and choices. This form of abuse is intricately linked to the need for abortion care, as such behaviors can include coercing or forcing someone into pregnancy through violence, threats, and/or birth control sabotage. Abusers often use these tactics as a means to keep their pregnant partners dependent and unable to leave the relationship. Ultimately, reproductive coercion undermines victim/survivors' reproductive autonomy and increases the need for reproductive healthcare.

Unfortunately, reproductive justice and freedom has not been a reality for many communities in our country. The Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ communities face higher rates of intimate partner violence and reproductive coercion. Throughout this country's history, the state has used force and policy to control the reproductive outcomes of the most vulnerable communities. For decades in the 19th and 20th centuries, Black and Indigenous peoples were forcibly sterilized through state and national policies. In recent years, immigrants fleeing violence were coercively sterilized or forced to have abortions while detained at ICE facilities. Additionally, LGBTQ+ communities are often forgotten and left out of conversations and policies surrounding reproductive justice. These communities also face high rates of economic marginalization that severely limits their access to reproductive healthcare and abortion. The Supreme Court's decision has exacerbated these barriers within reproductive justice for people of color and LGBTQ+ peoples.



In 2022, Governor Walz issued an executive order to protect those seeking or providing abortions in Minnesota from laws in other states. This was a proactive step forward in protecting abortion care and access, but we know that this initiative alone is simply not enough. Violence Free Minnesota supports the Protect Reproductive Options Act (PRO Act), a bill that would codify *Roe v. Wade* into Minnesota law and protect a person's right to abortion without undue interference. If we want to create a world free from violence, we must eliminate it in all its forms, whether that be interpersonal or systemic. We believe it is critical for lawmakers to do whatever it takes to ensure that abortion continues to be a legal right in Minnesota. We urge you to vote yes on HF1.