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**LAWMAKERS UNANIMOUSLY APPROVE CRITICAL PROTECTIONS**

**FOR MARYLAND WOMEN’S PRIVACY AND HEALTH**

*The Maryland General Assembly passes Senate Bill 790 – bill to protect confidential medical information in insurance communications for those seeking reproductive healthcare, mental health treatment, or seeking support to escape domestic violence*

**ANNAPOLIS (4/7/14)** - Today the Maryland General Assembly passed groundbreaking legislation that advances privacy protections of medical information contained in insurance communications.  Most commonly called “explanation of benefits,” insurance communications are sent to the policy holder and can reveal confidential information about medical services provided to the patient.

Planned Parenthood of Maryland led the campaign of community partners to work toward a solution to protect the privacy of all Marylanders.   Senate Bill 790 is a significant step in advancing privacy protections, as the bill will ensure Marylanders who are endangered by information in an explanation of benefits can redirect the forms to a mailing address of their choice.

                “This important bill offers a critical tool to protect patient privacy.   As a provider of reproductive health services, our patients delay or even forgo services because they are afraid an explanation of benefits will reveal private medical information to the policy holder, who may be a spouse or parent,” said Jenny Black, CEO of Planned Parenthood of Maryland.  “Without privacy protections, these patients are effectively uninsured and may not seek care they need,” added Black.

                Patient privacy is particularly important for individuals facing situations of domestic violence. “If people are afraid to seek care because of concerns about confidentiality, then they will not be getting the very care that can help them end the cycle of violence,” said Senator Delores G. Kelley (District 10, Baltimore County) who sponsored SB 790.  Senator Kelley is a lifelong champion of access to health care services, including reproductive health care.  She has been recognized by numerous awards, including “Legislator of the Year” from Planned Parenthood of Maryland in 2012.

“We are excited to support this important legislation, which will help victims of domestic violence seek services without fear of retribution from an abuser, and we applaud Planned Parenthood of Maryland and other advocates across the state for bringing the issue to light," said Lt. Governor Anthony G. Brown. "We look forward to implementing these important protections."

                The Maryland General Assembly deemed the bill “emergency legislation,” meaning that it goes into effect immediately upon enactment.   The bill requires the Maryland Insurance Administration to create a form which will allow any Marylander endangered by information revealed in insurance communications to redirect such communications to an address of their choice.   The form will make it easy for consumers to access privacy protections, particularly with the support of health care providers and advocates for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.   While such privacy protections exist in HIPAA, they are not well known because there have been no standard ways to access the protection.

"Planned Parenthood applauds Democrats and Republicans in Maryland for joining together to pass these critical safeguards that will help protect patient privacy, which is especially important for women's health,” said Cecile Richards, President of Planned Parenthood Federation of America.  “This vote is all the more significant because it shows that our elected officials can come together to advance women's health, instead of allowing partisan politicians to push dangerous and deeply unpopular legislation to restrict women’s access to reproductive health care.”

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The mission of Planned Parenthood of Maryland is to enable all Marylanders to have access to a wide range of high quality affordable reproductive health care services. By providing medical services, education, training and advocacy, PPM seeks to help individuals make informed decisions about their reproductive health, family planning options and sexuality.