

TO: SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
SENATOR DELORES KELLEY, CHAIR
SENATOR BRIAN FELDMAN, VICE CHAIR
COMMITTEE MEMBERS

SB837 (SENATOR KRAMER) – HEALTH – ADVANCE CARE PLANNING AND ADVANCE DIRECTIVES
SUPPORT

Studies show that about 40% of Marylanders have completed advance directives and that the rate among communities of color is about ½ that. The number for both should be closer to 100%.

Advance directives are free legal forms that empower patients to direct their medical care should they be unable to speak for themselves. There is, understandably, reluctance to talk about end-of-life care. While we Americans strive to control nearly every aspect of our lives, many of us abandon control of life's final passage. But the realities of healthcare today will allow most of us to have a say in how, when, and where we die, so we need to make decisions surrounding death, too.

Advance care planning and the completion of advance directives has always been an important way for individuals to exercise their values and wishes when managing medical care. The pandemic has made the need more compelling because patients may not be able to communicate their wishes due to the nature of the disease and because family members are not currently allowed at the bedside for safety reasons. Clinicians, like me, have long relied on families for information and direction.

At the request of legislative committees, the State's End-of-Life Care Council was requested to address steps to promote advance directive completion, and the report has been submitted to you separately. SB837 implements the recommendations of the report.

The benefits of advance directives are manifold. Care is personalized. Values are respected. Intra-family conflicts are minimized or avoided. Clinicians know what kind of care patients want. The end-of-life experience becomes more holistic, manageable, and compassionate. Health care costs are reduced.

The provisions of SB837 will make it likely that more Marylanders will take advantage of the legal framework that empowers them to make important health care decisions and that clinicians will have ready access to those decisions when needed.

Please vote for SB837. Thank you for your consideration.

Dan Morhaim, M.D.
11 Whitebridge Court
Pikesville, MD 21208