

**Board of Directors**

Brad S. Karp  
*Chairman*

Mary Beth Forshaw  
*Vice Chair*

Lymaris Albors  
Gerald Balacek  
Eric D. Balber  
Elizabeth Bartholet  
Suzanne B. Cusack  
Dawn Dover  
Jason Flom  
Alexis Gadsden  
Jeffrey D. Grant  
Doug Liman  
Ann-Marie Louison  
Elaine H. Mandelbaum  
Kamran Masood  
Michael Meltsner  
Mark C. Morrill  
Mary E. Mulligan  
Debra Pantin  
Elizabeth M. Sacksteder  
Sharon L. Schneier  
John J. Suydam  
Harya Tarekegn  
James Yates  
Richard Zabel

Arthur L. Liman  
*Founding Chairman*

Daniel K. Mayers  
*Chairman Emeritus*

**Executive Team**

Paul N. Samuels  
*Director & President*

Anita R. Marton  
*Sr. Vice President & Deputy Director*

Sally Friedman  
*Sr. Vice President of Legal Advocacy*

Tracie Gardner  
*Sr. Vice President of Policy Advocacy*

Ellen Weber  
*Sr. Vice President for Health Initiatives*

Gabrielle de la Guéronnière  
*Vice President of Health & Justice Policy*

Roberta Meyers Douglas  
*Vice President of State Strategy & Reentry*

Abigail Woodworth  
*Vice President of External Affairs*

Adela Prignal  
*Chief Financial Officer*

Sharon X. Hayes  
*Director of Operations*

**Health and Government Operations Committee Hearing**  
**Public Health – Consumer Health Information – Hub and Requirements – HB 1082**  
**March 9, 2022**  
**Support**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Consumer Health Information – Hub and Requirements (HB 1082). This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Legal Action Center, a law and policy organization that fights discrimination, builds health equity and restores opportunities for individuals with substance use disorders, arrest and conviction records, and HIV or AIDS. In Maryland, the Legal Action Center convenes the Maryland Parity Coalition and works with its partners to ensure non-discriminatory access to mental health and substance use disorder services through enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 and other initiatives.

Health literacy is essential for all individuals and families to ensure physical and mental health wellness, make informed decisions about prevention and treatment, participate actively in all health care planning and decisions, understand health insurance coverage of and access to benefits and services, and take advantage of remedies to address denials of medically necessary health services. HB 1082 would help improve health literacy among Marylanders by establishing and promoting the use of plain language and health literacy criteria, certifications, and best practices for state and local public agencies, health systems and other entities. It would also strive to address through improved health literacy the inequities in our health systems that have had a long and enduring devastating effect on the health and well-being of Black, Brown and other people of color.

**For individuals with substance use disorder and mental health conditions, the development of equity-focused, non-stigmatizing and accurate health information products, education programs and materials, and public media messages could not be more important.** The public is continually bombarded with stigmatizing, inappropriate and inaccurate portrayals of individuals with substance use and mental health conditions. These practices deter individuals from seeking treatment. Additionally, many have limited knowledge about the value and efficacy of behavioral health treatment. Far too many individuals with substance use disorders do not seek or access care because mainstream health systems themselves do not convey their understanding of or ability to deliver non-judgmental and effective interventions and treatment referrals. Those who seek behavioral health care do not know how to access services, understand the complex health care delivery system, understand their insurance coverage of such benefits, know how to navigate their health plans, or understand that they can challenge inappropriate denials of care.

The establishment of a Consumer Health Information Hub would help address these barriers to treatment and sustained recovery. It could assist state agencies, such as the Department of Health, the Maryland Insurance Administration and the Maryland Health Care Commission develop materials that support individuals and families who need accurate, informative and objective information about health care services for mental health and substance use disorders and insurance coverage of and access to such services. The hub could also lend assistance to non-governmental organizations that conduct outreach to and education for persons with behavioral health conditions about health services and insurance coverage, linkages to services, benefit navigation and resolution of care denials. Health literacy is a critical foundation to address and begin to reverse the devastating loss of life from untreated substance use disorders and mental illness.

Thank you for considering our view. We urge a favorable report on HB 1082,

Ellen M. Weber, J.D.  
Sr. Vice President for Health Initiatives  
Legal Action Center  
810 1<sup>st</sup> Street, N.E., Suite 200  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
202-544-5478 Ext. 307  
202-607-1047 (c)  
eweber@lac.org