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Legislative District 21  
Prince George's and  
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Health and Government  
Operations Committee

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Insurance and Pharmaceuticals

Chair, Public Health and  
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March 9, 2022

**Public Health – Consumer Health Information – Hub and Requirements  
Testimony of Delegate Joseline Peña-Melnyk (FWA)**

Chairman Pendergrass and fellow members of the Committee, I am pleased to present House Bill (HB) 1082. This bill addresses a common problem this Committee faces: what is an accessible, patient-centered health system for Marylanders? Each session we work to expand access to some aspect of health care: insurance coverage, maternal health, mental health, and substance use disorder services. Until now, we have not tackled a key social determinant and one of the root causes undermining Maryland's progress on health care access, equity, and more - that is health literacy.

What is health literacy? It's a two-sided situation about accessible, useful information and services for health. One side of health literacy we legislators know well because our constituents regularly call our offices to tell us about letters and forms that deny them benefits they thought they had, or charge them for services they thought were in-network. They tell us about not having access to broadband and telehealth services so they miss appointments and can't see their health care providers to get trustworthy, personalized advice and care.

But, we don't know the other side of health literacy as well. This is the side HB 1082 tackles. Our public agencies and health information and services' providers may be well-intentioned, but many times the information they create is too dense, and too complicated to be useful for our constituents. In addition, health services may be too

hard to find, understand and navigate to benefit our constituents to the maximum extent possible.

To be clear, health literacy isn't a problem of poor reading skills. It's a problem that affects all of us whenever we encounter health information and services that don't meet our needs in order to make healthy choices and live our best lives.

This is personal to me. As an 8 year-old, I helped my Spanish-speaking mom try to understand confusing, jargon-filled English language letters and forms that made no sense to her or to me. Yet, we both knew these letters and forms had important information we should understand and act upon. My mom and I would have been so much better off if we had received plain language information in Spanish with clear directions about what to do.

This is what we should want and help build for all Marylanders: a health system that gives them a fair chance at their best lives because they have the information and services to be as healthy as possible. HB 1082 designates the University of Maryland Horowitz Center for Health Literacy to support health information and services' providers so they can best serve Marylanders. The witnesses will explain why the Center's health literacy expertise can help our entire state evolve toward a more accessible, patient-centered system envisioned by the Total Cost of Care model.

Thank you for the opportunity to present HB 1082. I respectfully request a favorable report.