

Senate Bill 940
Prescription Drugs - Accessible Labels for Blind, Visually Impaired, and Print Disabled
Individuals (Pharmacies)
In the Finance Committee -Hearing on March 21, 2023
Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits its written and oral testimony on SB 940 at the request of bill sponsor Senator Muse.

MLA appreciates the opportunity to testify on this important bill, which will help our blind and visually impaired neighbors receive the medication they need. MLA is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to thousands of the State's low-income and vulnerable residents. Our 12 offices serve residents in each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions and handle a range of civil legal matters, including health law, and representation of visually impaired persons, disabled individuals and older adults.

MLA asks that the Committee report favorably on SB 940. This bill requires pharmacies to provide notice to blind or visually impaired customers and ensure that accessible prescription drug labels are available upon request. It also establishes standards for accessible labels and ensures that prescription readers, which provide information in an audible format, are available in conjunction with the accessible label. Due to the curved surface of prescription bottles and the characteristically small print, prescription labels are among the most inaccessible of documents to visually impaired individuals.

Individuals living below the poverty line have significantly greater odds of being blind, therefore blindness and visual impairment disproportionately impacts the low-income individuals that MLA serves. Visual impairment or blindness affects all areas of life, including administration of prescribed medications. Currently, the visually impaired community is at high-risk for medication errors, such as taking the wrong pill, the wrong dose, or taking an expired medication. At home medication administration errors occur up to 33% of the time. This bill is a simple intervention that can prevent potentially devastating outcomes like this.

Notice of Accessibility Assistance

SB 940 will increase access to accessible prescription labels. Verbal notice of accessible label options will be provided to each customer who picks up a prescription, which ensures that visually impaired individuals are aware of accessible prescription label options, even if they cannot see a posted notice.

Request and Requirements for an Accessible Label

SB 940 ensures that people who request an accessible label are informed of the various options available to them and are allowed to choose the format that best suits their needs. Also, the bill requires that accessible labels meet the informational standard to which all regular prescription labels are held, ensuring that blind and visually impaired individuals receive the same quality of prescription instruction and warnings as everyone else. An accessible label must be provided within a similar time frame to everyone else. This makes sure that people who require visual

accommodation are not treated differently, can understand their medication, and do not have to wait longer for prescription fulfillment.

Provision of a Prescription Reader

SB 940 provides that pharmacies must provide a prescription reader. These are devices that audibly convey information contained on a prescription label. SB 940 ensures that the accessible labels are compatible with the prescription readers. This is important because the law will require prescription readers to, in fact, be able to audibly transcribe the prescription label.

SB 940 will directly impact many low-income persons who are often unable to receive adequate assistance for visual impairment due to lack of insurance or resources.¹ Blindness disproportionately affects people living below the poverty line. SB 940 ensures that available resources, such as accessible label options, are brought to the attention of individuals who might otherwise be unaware.

MLA urges the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on Senate Bill 940. If you have any questions, please contact Genna Amick, (410) 951-7620, gamick@mdlab.org.