



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

SB0806: Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and Maryland Department of Health- Health Care Coverage for Undocumented Immigrants- Report

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

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The League of Women Voters Maryland supports Senate **Bill 806: Health Care Coverage for Undocumented Immigrants- Report**, which would require the development of a report comparing options for healthcare coverage for undocumented immigrants. **The League believes that healthcare is a human right, and that every U.S. resident should have access to affordable, quality health care.**

Marylanders need expanded and equitable access to care. No one should suffer with a treatable illness, or die from one, because their undocumented status leaves them unable to access the medical care they need.

Over 275,000 undocumented immigrants in Maryland are currently ineligible for Medicaid, MCHP, and Medicare coverage, and are unable to purchase health insurance through the Health Benefit Exchange.

But uninsured patients still require medical care, and they often wind up in hospital Emergency Rooms. As the healthcare setting of “last resort,” hospitals are mandated by the federal government to stabilize and treat all patients. Under EMTALA (the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act), passed by Congress in 1986, hospitals must provide care for every patient presenting with an emergency medical condition, regardless of their ability to pay. Violating the law can lead to termination of a hospital’s Medical Provider status: an extremely serious consequence.

Thus, if an undocumented immigrant presents to a hospital Emergency Department with crushing chest pain, sudden inability to speak, a bloody cough, or other symptoms indicating an emergency medical condition “such that the absence of immediate medical attention could reasonably be expected to result in placing the individual’s health in serious jeopardy...” the patient **WILL** receive necessary treatment. **In Maryland, the bill for that emergency treatment will be covered under Emergency Medicaid. And the hospital charges will likely be very expensive.**

But, if that patient had been receiving regular, appropriate, cost-effective medical care from a primary care provider- including needed lab tests, imaging, and medications- they would have been much less likely to need emergency care in an ER.

So while the State of Maryland pays for treatment of uninsured patients with potentially life-threatening medical emergencies, thousands of those patients, because of their immigration status, are not eligible for the high-quality non-emergency medical care that can be delivered in other, less expensive, and ultimately more effective settings.

As a society, a state, we are only as safe and healthy as the most vulnerable among us. ALL Maryland residents need access to affordable, equitable, quality health care. For that reason, the League and its 1,500+ members urge the committee to give a favorable report to Senate Bill 806.