



Center for Salud/Health and Opportunity for Latinos

Johns Hopkins Centro SOL

Mason F. Lord Bldg, Center Tower Suite 4200

5200 Eastern Avenue, Baltimore MD 21224

410.550.1129 | centrosol@jhmi.edu | www.jhcentrosol.org

Testimony: FAVORABLE for SB 806

Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and Maryland Department of Health - Health Care Coverage for Undocumented Immigrants - Report
Senate Finance Committee
March 8, 2023

Centro SOL, the center for *Salud*/Health and Opportunity for Latinos at Johns Hopkins, is pleased to support SB806.

Centro SOL is a Baltimore-based organization committed to promoting equity in health and opportunity for Latinos by developing patient and community-centered programs focused on physical and mental health, as well as clinical care innovations. Please note that while Centro SOL is partnered with Johns Hopkins University, this testimony does not necessarily represent the views of the University.

Latinos continue to have the highest uninsured rates of any racial or ethnic group within Maryland, despite an overall decrease in uninsured rates in the state. The Kaiser Family Foundation reported in 2019 that 21.4 percent of Hispanics in Maryland were uninsured, compared to 3.8 percent for non-Hispanic whites.¹ The high rate of uninsured Hispanic individuals can be partly attributed to the systematic exclusions certain immigrants face from federal health insurance programs. Some immigrants can participate in these programs, but undocumented immigrants and DACA recipients are still not eligible.

Maryland is more diverse now than when the Affordable Care Act was first enacted in 2010. As of 2017, two hundred and seventy-five thousand undocumented immigrants reside in Maryland, accounting for about 5% of Maryland's population.² Further, one in five workers in Maryland is an immigrant. Their work and entrepreneurship contribute to Maryland's economic growth and vitality. Despite the profound contributions immigrants make to the state, their essential role in the Maryland workforce, and millions in contributions to the economy through federal, state, and local taxes - they are still ineligible for the Affordable Care Act. Even when they meet all other basic eligibility requirements, many cannot buy health coverage from the State's Marketplace because of their immigration status.

Changing the State's law to extend access to health care to immigrants who are not eligible due to immigration status is a necessary next step to meet the health needs of immigrants.

In 2022 this committee took a bold step in ensuring that pregnant women have access to care for their unborn babies. The Healthy Babies Equity Act, expands Medicaid to pregnant individuals who meet the normal requirements of the program regardless of immigration status.

¹ Kaiser Family Foundation, Uninsured Rates for the Nonelderly by Race/Ethnicity, <https://www.kff.org/uninsured/state-indicator/nonelderly-uninsured-rate-by-raceethnicity/?currentTimeframe=0&selectedRows=%7B%22states%22:%7B%22maryland%22:%7B%7D%7D%7D&sortModel=%7B%22colld%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

² Jens Manuel Krogstad, Jeffrey S. Passel, and D'Vera Cohn, 5 Facts About Illegal Immigration in the U.S., (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, June 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>



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We know this will have an immediate positive impact on our communities. SB 806 seeks to gather information to help us better serve our uninsured residents by comparing options for offering affordable healthcare coverage to State residents who are ineligible for the Maryland Medical Assistance Program, the Maryland Children’s Health Program, or qualified health plans through the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange due to the individual’s immigration status.

This common-sense legislation is uncontentious and aligns Maryland with its values of protecting our communities and treating all people with dignity, respect, and care. Centro SOL urges the committee to provide a favorable report of Senate Bill 806.

Monica Guerrero Vazquez, MS, MPH
Executive Director
Centro SOL

Sarah Polk, MD, ScM
Co-Director, Centro SOL
Associate Professor of Pediatrics
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

Maria Ruiz
Centro SOL Policy Group Coordinator
MPH Candidate
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Joshua Sharfstein, MD
Centro SOL Policy Group
Professor of the Practice in Health Policy and
Management
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

³ Kaiser Family Foundation, Health Coverage and Care for Immigrants, (Washington, DC: Kaiser Family Foundation, December 2017), <https://www.kff.org/disparities-policy/fact-sheet/health-coverage-of-immigrants>.