



Kennedy Krieger Institute

DATE: March 8, 2023 **COMMITTEE:** Senate Finance
BILL NO: Senate Bill 806
BILL TITLE: Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and Maryland Department of Health - Health Care Coverage for Undocumented Immigrants - Report
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 806 - Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and Maryland Department of Health - Health Care Coverage for Undocumented Immigrants - Report

Bill Summary:

Senate Bill 806 would require the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and the Maryland Department of Health to develop a report comparing options for offering affordable health care coverage to State residents who are ineligible for the Maryland Medical Assistance Program, the Maryland Children's Health Program, or qualified health plans due to the individuals' immigration status; and requiring the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange to report its findings and recommendations to certain committees of the General Assembly by October 31, 2023.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive, and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger's services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based, and community-based programs. Over 27,000 individuals receive services annually at Kennedy Krieger.

The vision for the newly established Office for Health Equity Inclusion and Diversity (O-HEID) at Kennedy Krieger Institute is to promote the health and well-being of those who work and receive training and services at Kennedy Krieger Institute. The O-HEID uses evidence, culturally relevant, and equity-based approaches that assures diversity and inclusion. The O-HEID is working to establish collaboration, data, and metrics to address remediable disparities within our patient populations, policies, and practices.

Rationale:

Maryland is now the most diverse state on the east coast.¹ In Maryland, undocumented immigrants represent 5% of the total state population including approximately 275,000 individuals² who have significant barriers to insurance eligibility due to their legal status. Distress due to immigration status is associated with the physical and mental health of undocumented immigrants, with difficulties in accessing healthcare underlying this relationship.³ One in four children in Maryland has at least one immigrant parent and though the vast majority of these children are U.S. citizens (86%),⁴ families with mixed documentation status often have multiple and chronic stressors to their health including history of trauma and limited opportunities.⁵ Lack of health insurance increases the risk of developing preventable conditions and undocumented immigrants are particularly vulnerable due language barriers and challenges with health care access. ***This is important from a fiscal perspective because undocumented immigrants comprise 6% of the Maryland workforce as of 2016 and they paid an estimated \$373.5 million in federal taxes and \$242.3 million in state and local taxes in 2018.***²

In addition to the fiscal implications of a large segment of the population being uninsured, health-care providers have ethical obligations to provide care to all individuals regardless of "race, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, or any other social category."⁶ There is a public health imperative to improve undocumented immigrants' ability to access vaccinations that benefits the community as a whole.⁷ Overall, given the current structural barriers in the population of undocumented individuals, there is a lack of empirical information regarding policies affecting undocumented individuals and their health.⁸ As such, we support further investigation and a report on affordable healthcare options for undocumented individuals who are currently ineligible for coverage.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 806.

References

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