



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 274

Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times

Before the House Health and Government Operations Committee

By Stephanie Klapper, Deputy Director, Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative

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Chair Peña-Melnyk and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 274. Special thank you to Delegate Bhandari for being the lead sponsor for the bill. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of our individual organization, Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, Inc., as we have not reviewed this legislation with the full Maryland Health Care for All! Coalition. Our mission is to ensure that all Marylanders have access to quality affordable health care coverage.

Excessive emergency department wait times are a serious concern for patients. For many Marylanders, periodic visits to the emergency department are the only times they interact with hospital personnel in a given year. Longer ED wait times erode patient confidence in the hospital system and are perceived by many as an indicator of poor quality care provision. We can and should do better to reduce emergency department wait times for both those eventually being admitted and those being discharged. We realize this is a complex issue. While ED wait times were already a problem prior to the pandemic, the pandemic also exacerbated health care work force shortages and behavioral health needs. A task force devoted to examining this issue would be able to make recommendations about how our communities can come together to solve this problem. It is important that consumers be represented in the task force membership and that consumer voices are elevated by the task force.

We appreciate the efforts that Maryland hospitals have already made, and also appreciate that hospitals are taking extra time to educate patients and connect them with appropriate community resources, and we do not want to discourage hospitals from equipping patients to take care of their health upon discharge. Further, we hope that the state and community providers can support hospitals in achieving shorter wait-times for those who need to be admitted while still providing robust ED services to everyone who enters the ED.

We urge a favorable report for HB 274.