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TESTIMONY ON HB363 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and Maryland Department of Health - Health Care Coverage for Undocumented Immigrants - Report (Medicaid Expansion)

TO: Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Kelly, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Zackary Berger, MD, PhD, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Zackary Berger and I am a resident of District 43A, in Baltimore City. On behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), I am submitting this testimony in support of HB363 - Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and Maryland Department of Health - Health Care Coverage for Undocumented Immigrants - Report (Medicaid Expansion). JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jews and allies from across the state in support of social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

Jewish texts insist that we turn our own historical experiences of being outsiders in many foreign lands into compassion for those experiencing the same today. As Jews and as human beings, we are obligated to make sure that those of us who were not born into our community are as safe, and as healthy, as those of us who were. I am a primary care physician in Baltimore, and many of my patients are undocumented immigrants who work hard and came to Maryland looking for a better life for themselves and their families. In many cases, they fled violence and terrible injustice to what for them is a promised land of equity and democracy.

Over the more than a decade of my medical practice, I have discovered a tragic irony. Maryland, one of the richest states of the Union, is particularly inequitable in its medical treatment of the undocumented. I see this time and again in my patients who suffer terminal kidney disease, a condition particularly common among this group (perhaps due to the jobs they did in their countries of origin). When their kidneys fail, my patients are not eligible for Medicaid, and they can't get a transplant. I'll say this again: They cannot get a replacement organ. People lucky enough to be born on the other side of an artificial border can get these organs. My patients

can't. I have found myself advising people to move to Illinois or California, where undocumented immigrants are able to access the treatment that they need. Why is Maryland behind these places? What have my patients done wrong?

The answer, of course, is nothing. More than 275,000 undocumented immigrants in our state are ineligible for care through the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange. As Marylanders, we can do right by establishing equity, or taking the necessary steps to do so, by researching what it would take to enroll the undocumented in Medicaid. Then we'll be able to look our neighbors in the face, know that we are treating them humanely and with dignity, and make our state a safer, healthier place for all.

On behalf of Jews United for Justice, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB363.