



HB363 – SUPPORT

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Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and Maryland Department of Health
- Health Care Coverage for Undocumented Immigrants - Report
House Health and Government Operations Committee

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Dear Honorable Chair Peña-Melynk and Members of the Committee,

My name is Laura Atwood. I have lived in Maryland since 1999, and I represent Takoma Park Mobilization, an all-volunteer grassroots advocacy organization founded in 2016 that is active in environmental, justice, economic, and electoral matters. We are in SUPPORT of HB363, which would be an important step in reducing healthcare inequities within Maryland.

I'm also testifying as a healthcare employee who's so often struck by how many health problems, with accompanying anguish and multidimensional costs, could be prevented. I'd like to share the story of one man, whom I'll call Mario, who was my home health patient a few years ago. I work as a home physical therapist with patients who are "homebound," or unable to tolerate going to a physical therapy clinic; I typically make 4-6 visits per day, and people invite me into their homes and lives, hoping that I can help them get stronger and healthier.

Normally people without insurance are simply absent from my worklife. But Mario had come through my organization's hospitals and we were able to make a very few unreimbursed visits; even this is uncommon.

Mario had lost insurance when he changed jobs, didn't qualify for Medicaid or ACA subsidies because of immigration status, and couldn't afford his cardiac medications. Yes, these stories are real, in the form of so many human beings. So he had a simultaneous heart attack and stroke, couldn't return to his restaurant job which included heavy lifting, and couldn't pay rent for his room in a family's home; the family (including elementary school children) relied on that income as well but didn't want to make him homeless. The man was in his early 50s and eager to work, but unable when I last saw him.

How much better, in so many ways, would it have been to prevent the cascade of devastation from Mario's lack of health insurance? We need to do what we can, going forward, to find the best way to prevent others from facing Mario's situation. HB363 is an important step.

Takoma Park Mobilization therefore urges a favorable report on HB363.