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HB 274
Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department Wait Times
Hearing of The House Health & Government Operations Committee
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1:00 PM

SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. **PJC supports HB 274**, establishing the Task Force on Reducing Emergency Department (ER) Wait Times to study best practices for reducing emergency department wait times. It would also require the Task Force to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by January 1, 2024.

Though Maryland is a leader in the country in expanding health care access, our State is failing its patients who need emergency care. Maryland has the longest Emergency Room (ER) wait times in the country, with patients spending an average of 228 minutes waiting in the ER. Long wait times can not only increase the risk of adverse health events, including complications leading to hospitalization, but these long waiting periods also put working Marylanders without access to comprehensive sick leave at risk of losing their jobs. Further, when patients have competing priorities, such as work and childcare duties, long ER wait times can be a significant deterrent from seeking needed care. Additionally, there are times where individuals who arrive to the ER may actually need referral for non-urgent health care services rather than ER care and have lost significant amounts of time waiting to be assessed and referred to a more appropriate setting.

HB 274 seeks to address this serious issue by assembling a task force to study best practices in states with lower ER wait times that are similar in population size to Maryland. Understanding factors that contribute to long ER wait times, such as staffing, triage practices and bed availability, is critical to improving the experience Marylanders have when they enter an ER.

The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB 274**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 ext. 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.