



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

February 19, 2024

Senate Bill 0594: Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0594 Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity

Obesity is a chronic condition that impacts millions of Americans and Marylanders alike. Today, nearly 2 out of 5 Americans are classified as obese (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2022). Obesity impacts all systems of the human body and can put individuals at a higher risk for other serious conditions such as heart disease or stroke; both of which are leading causes of death for Americans (CDC, 2024). Poor diet and physical inactivity are the two largest contributors to obesity. The standard American diet consists of many foods with high levels of salt, saturated fats, and sugar. Instead of putting nutritious food in our body, many Americans consume foods that are high in calories but low in nutritional value for the sake of affordability or convenience. According to the CDC, over 25% of Americans are physically inactive (2022). With Americans consuming high calorie foods with inadequate exercise, it is no shock that so many struggle with obesity. Although diet and exercise seem to be the obvious solution, it is much easier said than done for our most vulnerable populations. For example, African Americans, low-income individuals, or rural Maryland residents are all at a much higher risk of being obese than compared to their counterparts (CDC, 2022). Healthier food options have become expensive, and those with tight budgets cannot withstand the financial burden healthy foods impose on their household. For those with demanding schedules, it is more convenient to grab food on the go or order out rather than making something of nutritional value at home. Marylanders who receive healthcare coverage under the Maryland Medical Assistance Program are likely to have low incomes, which not only makes affording healthy food difficult, but also paying for medical treatment. By extending coverage to treatment for obesity, Marylanders will be able to turn their health around by losing weight. In turn the weight loss can reduce the prevalence of high blood pressure and diabetes, and subsequently the risk for heart disease and stroke. Notification for change in coverage is extremely important for Maryland medical assistance program participants as they may go unaware of the new opportunity for obesity treatment. Due to these benefits that will directly improve the health of the residents of rural Maryland, the Maryland Rural Health Association supports SB0594: Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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