



February 20, 2024

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Katherine Klausmeier
Vice Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for SB 594- Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier:

On behalf of the Alliance for Patient Access (AfPA), I am writing to express our strong support of SB 594, which would require Maryland to include comprehensive coverage for obesity treatment for state-sponsored health plans. As you are aware, patients with obesity now have FDA-approved pharmacologic options to treat obesity disease. However, ensuring patients can access appropriate obesity care is paramount to addressing the obesity epidemic.

Founded in 2006, AfPA is a national network of policy-minded health care providers who advocate for patient-centered care. AfPA supports health policies that reinforce clinical decision making, promote personalized care and protect the clinician-patient relationship. Motivated by these principles, AfPA members participate in clinician working groups, advocacy initiatives, stakeholder coalitions and the creation of educational materials.

The obesity epidemic in the United States is no secret. The New England Journal of Medicine predicts that 1 in 2 adults will have obesity by 2030, while 1 in 4 adults will have severe obesity. Currently, 42.7% of Maryland adults have obesity. In addition, communities of color in Maryland are disproportionately impacted by obesity with over 50% of Black adults and 43% of Hispanic adults experiencing obesity.

As you consider the overall health and well-being of Marylanders, these numbers are impossible to ignore. Obesity is not an insular disease; we know it is related to many other diseases including certain cancers, heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. Furthermore, obesity is expensive. The aggregate annual medical costs due to obesity among adults in the United States is over \$260 billion. Total obesity-related government expenditures, including Medicaid and Medicare spending and federal outlays, are estimated to be \$91.6 billion per year, approximately 30% of Medicare spending.¹ Patients are also experiencing higher costs associated with obesity. Adults with obesity in the United States compared with those with lower BMIs experienced higher annual medical care costs of \$2,505.² These disparities are even more apparent for patients in lower socioeconomic areas who are more likely to have obesity and experience higher out-of-pocket costs.³

Importantly, in recent years, the FDA has approved several therapies for the treatment of obesity, meant to be used in conjunction with lifestyle changes. These treatment options have been revolutionary in ensuring patients and providers have additional tools to handle this complicated disease. Proper and effective

¹ <https://www.jmcp.org/doi/10.18553/jmcp.2021.20410>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10394178/>

³ Ibid

treatment of obesity would benefit patients through improved health outcomes, as well as the health care system in the form of savings.

Given the impact of obesity, SB 594 is an important step toward addressing this treatable disease. This legislation ensures that individual or group health plans include comprehensive coverage for the treatment of obesity. Allowing patients and providers to access the full regimen of treatment options, including behavioral therapy and anti-obesity medications, will have a positive impact on obesity patients throughout Maryland.

It is for these reasons that we believe SB 594 is crucial to solving Maryland's obesity epidemic. We respectfully request you allow this bill to advance through the legislative process, as it is imperative patients and providers have access to all available tools to treat obesity. If we can provide further details or answer any questions, please reach out to Casey McPherson at cmcpherson@allianceforpatientaccess.org or (202)951-7097.

Sincerely,

Fatima Hussein, MD
Ellicott City, Maryland

CC:

Senator Ellis
Senator Gile
Senator Hayes
Senator Hershey
Senator Kramer
Senator Lam
Senator Mautz
Senator Ready
Senator Washington