

STEPHEN S. HERSHEY, JR.
Legislative District 36
Caroline, Cecil, Kent, and
Queen Anne's Counties

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MINORITY LEADER
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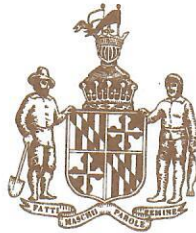
Finance Committee

Executive Nominations Committee

Rules Committee
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Joint Committee on Legislative Ethics

Legislative Policy Committee



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 423
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3639 · 301-858-3639
800-492-7122 Ext. 3639
Fax 410-841-3762 · 301-858-3762
Steve.Hershey@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 20, 2024

Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Health and Government Operations Committee
241 House Office Building
Re: Senate Bill 594 Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity

Dear Chairwoman and Members of the Committee,

Senate Bill 594 requires Medicaid to provide coverage for the treatment of obesity, including coverage for intensive behavioral therapy, bariatric surgery, and any medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for those patients indicated for chronic weight management with obesity.

Obesity is recognized as a disease by organizations that include the World Health Organization, the FDA, the NIH, the IRS, the American Medical Association, the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, and the Endocrine Society.

Obesity is caused by a range of biologic, genetic, social, behavior, and environmental factors, which may increase the risks for other chronic conditions including Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, infertility, stroke, and some cancers.

Obesity is linked to more than 200 comorbid conditions. Patients living with obesity are at an increased risk of developing weight-related comorbidities, such as cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, sleep apnea, depression, asthma, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, type 2 diabetes, knee and hip osteoarthritis, gout and more.

Obesity is treatable and should be treated. Maryland Medicaid covers the cost of bariatric surgery, but currently prohibits coverage for pharmacotherapy. We should be treating not only the symptoms of obesity but also the cause.

Maryland ranks 22nd in the nation for obesity and overweight- 34.3% has obesity and nearly 70% of the state has obesity and overweight. The most impacted population are from the African American community accounting for 41.7% of the obesity population and 32.8% of the obesity population being Hispanic.

Our state needs to shift from a system of sick-care to well-care, especially within our most vulnerable population – Medicaid participants.

As amended, Senate Bill 594 requires the Department of Health, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, to study the impact of requiring the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide comprehensive coverage for the treatment of Obesity and report its findings by December 31, 2024.

Amendment 1 Alters the Title, Purpose and Function Paragraphs.

Amendment 2 Strikes the bill as introduced and substitutes the required study, as described.

I urge your favorable report for Senate Bill 594.