



**Testimony to the House Health & Government Operations Committee
HB328 Hospitals-Financial Assistance Policies-Revisions
Position: Favorable**

February 14, 2024

The Honorable Joseline Pena-Melnyk, Chair
Health & Government Operations Committee
Room 241, HOB
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Health & Government Operations Committee

Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee,

Economic Action Maryland (formerly the Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition) is a people-centered movement to expand economic rights, housing justice, and community reinvestment for working families, low-income communities, and communities of color. Economic Action Maryland provides direct assistance today while passing legislation and regulations to create systemic change in the future.

I am writing to urge your strong support for HB691, which would add gender affirming care to the definition of legally protected health care. Last year, this committee made great strides in enhancing LGBTQ+ rights in the state of Maryland by passing the Trans Health Equity Act, which establishes that gender affirming care is covered by Medicaid. Now is the time to protect these treatments under law. In 2015, 22% of transgender Marylanders fell below the federal poverty line.¹ By legally protecting these treatments, the bill ensures that low-income transgender individuals have access to the same standard of care as their wealthier counterparts, regardless of their financial situation.

Additionally, by legally protecting these treatments and ensuring that healthcare practitioners cannot face professional repercussions for providing them, more healthcare providers are likely to offer these services, increasing the availability of gender-affirming care options. This has the potential to reduce wait times for individuals receiving treatment, which in turn can make these services more accessible and affordable for low-income individuals who may otherwise forgo or delay necessary treatment due to cost concerns. There are an estimated 92,000 Marylanders who identify as trans or nonbinary. As gender-affirming care is necessary for health outcomes amongst this population, it is vital that this care is legally protected.

In a time when many states across the country are attacking the rights of transgender people and pursuing legal action against them, it is crucial that our state ensures the protection of all Marylanders. There should be no circumstance in which a transgender Marylander must take on the costly expense of travel to another state in order to receive the care that they need.

For these reasons we urge a favorable report.
Sincerely,

Zoe Gallagher, Policy Associate

¹ <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/USTS%20MD%20State%20Report.pdf>