



February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
The Honorable Joseline Pena-Melnyk  
Health and Government Operations Committee  
241 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk,

I write this letter in strong support of the **“Health Insurance – Qualified Resident Enrollment Program” ACCESS TO CARE ACT HB728/SB705**.

As Maryland’s Director of Immigrant Affairs, I recognize that this bill will generate an enormous positive impact on the quality of life of our inhabitants.

Our immigrant community is one of the most vulnerable groups in our state. Despite the fact that many immigrants pay into the state tax revenue system, they don’t receive the same benefits of other residents. In 2021 a total of 90,000 immigrants, who do not have a current legal residency, paid more than 93 million dollars in state and local taxes using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number. They pay our sales tax when purchasing merchandise and some of them even paid a percentage of wages into Social Security that they will never use.

Their opportunities are very limited because of their legal status. They don’t qualify for several tax credits, some benefits, and even for local or federal loans. Because their income is very low, their challenges are very high and by not having the option to purchase affordable health insurance, their lives and their children are at risk.

A primary care basic visit can cost between \$170 and \$300 if you do not have health insurance. And if laboratory tests are required, it can increase up to \$600, which is the average weekly salary of an undocumented immigrant. Some facilities charge thousands. We know that due to their low salaries and high expenses, many immigrants will forgo a visit to the doctor unless it’s an extreme emergency.

Many health problems can be avoided by having health insurance, so that immigrants can receive preventive care for themselves and their children. This bill will save lives, it will reduce the number of severe health conditions, diseases or health problems such as diabetes, heart risks or cancer. Problems that can be attacked in the early stages and not when the body can no longer handle them.

The truth of the matter is that we have people who are here, who require services, and should be able to access the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange.

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This bill will help families, will help hospitals, and will help everyone in the state of Maryland. That's our promise, that Maryland leaves no one behind.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adriana", written in a cursive style.

Adriana Lee, Director of Immigrant Affairs

Governor's Office of Community Initiatives