



*Eliminating Heart Health Disparities Among
African American Women and Women of Color*

March 7, 2024

Submitted electronically and orally:

<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/MyMGATracking/WitnessSignup>

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: House Bill 1137 – SUPPORT

Dear Madame Speaker,

I am writing in favor of passing House Bill 1137 for CT Scanning for Calcium Score Testing, as required coverage through the Maryland Medical Assistance Program for the early detection of cardiovascular disease. I am a heart attack survivor, having had emergency open heart surgery due to coronary artery disease (CAD), and 99.9% blockage in my LAD, also known as the widow maker, and the main artery. I was 54 years old. I am a mother, a daughter, a sister, an auntie, and a black woman. Heart disease is the #1 killer, in the United States and in the state of Maryland. Therefore, we must start to standardize cardiac screenings for early detection and prevention of heart attacks and strokes. The time is now. It should not take 99.9% blockage and a heart attack before the needed cardiac screenings are performed.

Prior to my heart attack, I had no knowledge of my cholesterol levels, and blockages. Nor did I receive adequate cardiac diagnostic screenings. I suffered for nearly a year with shortness of breath, and mild signs of distress, which eventually led up to my heart attack. The basic screenings that I received at the ER consisted of chest x-rays, EKG, and during one visit, a nuclear stress test. All of which did not reveal possible signs of blockage. On the last hospital visit, I was told to seek counseling, as if the pain was all in my head. This created a huge disparity in treatment, mistrust, inequity in the healthcare system, and I vowed not to return to the hospital, which nearly cost me my life. I cannot help but think about those who did not make it. So, I stand here for myself as well as others.

House Bill 1137 would require Maryland Medical Assistance Program and insurers, nonprofit health plans, health maintenance organizations, and managed care

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organizations to provide coverage for calcium score testing for individuals who have at least three of the following risk factors:

Diabetes
High blood pressure
High cholesterol
Family history of premature coronary artery disease

By detecting coronary artery disease (CAD) early, it can prevent untimely deaths and reduce hospitalizations, for individuals who are at high risk of developing CAD. Through my experience with being misdiagnosed and lack of adequate cardiac screenings, this has led me to my passion for justice in fair treatment in heart health equity. By passing this bill, we, in the state of Maryland, will help pave the way and close the gap in needed preventive services, which would reduce the mortality rate of heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States.

Regards,



Dr. Florence Champagne, CEO
Open My Heart Foundation, Inc.