

## Testimony in Support of HB 1306 Sickle Cell Disease – Specialized Clinics and Scholarship Program for Medical Residents

### Opening:

*Good (morning/afternoon), Chairperson (Name), esteemed members of the committee, and fellow advocates. My name is Rev. Cindy Banks, and I serve as the pastor of two United Methodist churches in Southern Maryland. As United Methodists, social justice is at the heart of our mission—we are called to care for the vulnerable, advocate for those in need, and work toward a just and compassionate society. I also come before you as a grandmother of two granddaughters and as a former medical professional who has worked closely with patients suffering from debilitating diseases, including sickle cell disease.*

*I strongly support HB 1306, which seeks to establish specialized clinics for the management and treatment of sickle cell disease and create a scholarship program for medical residents specializing in hematology with a focus on sickle cell. This bill is a necessary and long-overdue step in ensuring that Maryland provides comprehensive, specialized, and equitable healthcare for individuals battling this disease.*

### Personal Connection & Firsthand Experience:

*Throughout my years in the medical field, I have witnessed the immense suffering caused by sickle cell disease. I have seen children, young adults, and families endure excruciating pain crises, frequent hospitalizations, and a lack of access to specialized care. Too often, patients face long emergency room waits where their pain is dismissed or misunderstood, leading to delayed and inadequate treatment. I have walked alongside parents who have felt helpless, forced to advocate tirelessly for their child to receive the care they desperately need.*

*As a grandmother, I cannot help but think about the futures of my own granddaughters and all the young people in our state who deserve access to **quality healthcare and well-trained specialists** who understand the complexities of sickle cell disease. No family should have to fight to find competent care for a disease that is well-documented and well-researched. No patient should be treated as an afterthought simply because their disease is not as widely recognized as others.*

### Why This Bill is Urgent and Necessary:

#### 1. Specialized Clinics Will Provide Lifesaving, Comprehensive Care

- *Despite sickle cell disease affecting over 100,000 Americans—many of whom reside in Maryland—there are still far too few clinics specifically designed to manage this complex condition. Without access to dedicated specialists, patients are left cycling through emergency rooms or primary care offices that may not have the expertise to properly manage their condition.*
- *This bill ensures that patients have access to comprehensive care, including pain management, transfusion services, mental health support, and social services—all critical components for improving quality of life and life expectancy.*

#### 2. Investing in Medical Training is Key to Addressing Health Disparities

- *Sickle cell disease primarily affects African American and Latino communities, yet there is a significant shortage of hematologists who specialize in its treatment. This leads to **delayed diagnoses, inadequate pain management, and a cycle of poor healthcare outcomes.***
  - *By funding scholarships for medical residents specializing in benign or classical hematology with a focus on sickle cell, we are **investing in a future where Maryland has well-trained physicians who understand and prioritize the needs of these patients.***
3. **\$6 Million in Funding is a Necessary and Just Investment**
- *The proposed appropriation of \$6,000,000 in the annual budget is not just a funding request—it is a commitment to equity, health justice, and the well-being of Maryland residents.*
  - *This investment will support clinic operations, staffing, training, and social support services, ensuring that sickle cell patients receive **consistent, specialized, and compassionate care** without being left behind in our healthcare system.*

### **A Compassionate Call to Action: Bringing Awareness and Change**

*This bill is not just about funding—it is about lives. It is about the thousands of Maryland residents who wake up every day in pain, uncertain about where to turn for proper care. It is about families who are exhausted from fighting for their loved ones to receive treatment that should already be available. It is about righting a systemic wrong and ensuring that sickle cell patients are no longer overlooked in our healthcare system.*

*I urge you to **pass this bill and stand on the side of justice, equity, and compassion.** Let Maryland be a leader in sickle cell treatment, education, and medical training. Let us ensure that every patient receives the care they deserve and that every medical professional has the resources and knowledge to provide it. Let us not wait until another generation of patients suffers due to our inaction. The time to act is now.*

*Thank you for your time, your commitment to this cause, and your willingness to make a difference. I am happy to answer any questions.*

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