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Charles County

Ways and Means Committee

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB1306 - Public Health - Sickle Cell Disease - Specialized Clinics and Scholarship Program for Medical Residents

Good afternoon, Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. For the record, I am Delegate Edith Patterson, sponsor of HB1306 - Public Health - Sickle Cell Disease - Specialized Clinics and Scholarship Program for Medical Residents.

Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) is a severe, life-threatening genetic blood disorder that affects over 5,000 Marylanders, with more than 50% relying on Medicaid for their care. Historically, specialized SCD treatment has been concentrated in Baltimore City. However, only 30% of Maryland's SCD patients reside in Baltimore City and County, leaving many without sufficient access to care near their homes. As a result, patients are often forced to travel two or more hours for treatment, leading to increased reliance on local emergency rooms—many of which lack access to comprehensive SCD infusion clinics—while also driving up Medicaid costs.

A proven model for success already exists. In 2022, an adult SCD center was established at Capital Region Medical Center with the support of Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland. This program connects specialists from these institutions to a community-based clinic, serving 1,600 SCD patients who previously had to travel to Baltimore for treatment. Establishing this center and connecting the community-based clinic to specialists has reduced ER visits by 63%, decreased hospital admissions by 41%, increased access to care for patients, and lowered the costs of the state Medicaid Program.

Building on this success, this legislation seeks to replicate the Capital Region model statewide. Specifically, it calls for the establishment of three additional SCD centers as special care hubs in Montgomery County, Harford County, and a county on Maryland's Eastern Shore. These centers will provide coordinated, comprehensive medical care, linking outpatient services with inpatient treatment at specialized institutions such as the University of Maryland Medical System and Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Given the significant challenges that SCD patients face, this legislation is an essential step toward ensuring that patients are provided with adequate and comprehensive care throughout the state. By establishing and supporting a network of clinics, it will ensure that care can be provided to SCD patients in Maryland.

In summary, this legislation is a straightforward yet impactful measure to provide adequate care to SCD patients in the communities that they live in. It addresses a lack of sufficient access to care where it is needed and ensures that SCD patients will have access to comprehensive care.

I respectfully urge you to give HB1306 a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration,

Edith Patterson, Charles County