



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 0297

**Maryland Health Benefit Exchange – State–Based Young Adult
Health Insurance Subsidies Pilot Program – Sunset Repeal**

House Health and Government Operations Committee

FAVORABLE

TO: Delegate Joseline Peña-Melynk, Chair; Delegate Bonnie Cullison, Vice Chair;
and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

FROM: Rev. Kenneth Phelps, Jr., Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network

DATE: January 30, 2025

The Episcopal Church supports comprehensive health care and recognizes the need for universal and equitable access for all. General Convention urges Episcopalians to advocate for adequate health care, along with nutrition and housing, as human rights that should be provided to all those residing in our nation, including veterans, students, and immigrants, undocumented or otherwise. This advocacy on a number of healthcare policy asks is viewed as a Church ministry and as a way to promote healthy American communities.

The Diocese of Maryland is pleased to offer a favorable testimony in strong support of the HB 0297. In 2021 Maryland first enacted a subsidies law which invested up to \$20 million per year for two years to help lower-income young adults ages 18-34 purchase health coverage. House Bill 0297 would remove the sunset on this important health care program.

The pilot program has been very successful. Young adults are the age group most likely to be uninsured, and this program has made great strides in helping them gain coverage. According to Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE) since the start of the program young adult enrollment increased much faster than enrollment as a whole (46% vs. 30%), and is benefitting over 64,000 people for health plan year 2025. Many young adults have been able to purchase coverage from Maryland Health Connection for the first time, while others are better able to pay their premiums each month to avoid losing coverage. Young adults have upgraded to higher metal-level plans with lower deductibles, co-insurance, and co-pays. This program also continues



to reduce disparities by race and ethnicity. In 2024 enrollment by Black young adults (age 18-34) increased year over year by 46%, and enrollment by Hispanic young adults increased by 50% compared to an overall enrollment increase of 27% for all young adults age 18-34.

Young adults now make up 36% of total enrollment, which is helping to stabilize market premiums for all age groups by bringing more healthy people into the risk pool.

The Diocese of Maryland requests a Favorable report