



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

The Maryland House of Delegates, 6 Bladen Street, Room 300, Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3185 • 301-858-3185 • 800-492-7122 Ext. 3185 • Fax 410-841-3175 • 301-858-3175 • Black.Caucus@house.state.md.us

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February 6, 2025

Chair Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports House Bill 424 (HB0424) – Lowering Prescription Drug Costs for All Marylanders Now Act. This bill introduces essential reforms to Maryland’s prescription drug pricing system, ensuring that all residents who are disproportionately impacted by high healthcare costs have access to affordable medications. **House Bill 424 is a 2025 Black Caucus legislative priority bill.**

The United States has witnessed alarming instances of pharmaceutical price gouging, which have severely impacted patient access to essential medications. A notable example occurred in 2015 when Turing Pharmaceuticals, under CEO Martin Shkreli, acquired the rights to Daraprim, an essential medication used to treat and prevent malaria and HIV among other uses. Within a month, the company increased the price from \$13.50 to \$750 per pill, an astronomical hike of over 5,000%. This exorbitant increase placed a life-saving medication out of reach for many patients.

In contrast, countries such as Australia and South Korea have implemented effective government oversight to regulate drug prices while maintaining pharmaceutical innovation. Australia’s Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) uses an independent review board to assess drug prices and negotiate fair costs with manufacturers, ensuring affordability without restricting access. Similarly, South Korea’s National Health Insurance system negotiates drug prices with pharmaceutical companies to keep medications affordable while ensuring quality care. These models demonstrate that strong regulatory frameworks can reduce drug prices without stifling medical advancements.

The issue of high prescription drug costs hits Black communities particularly hard, exacerbating existing health disparities. Black Marylanders are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions like hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, all of which require ongoing medication. However, the high cost of these prescriptions creates treatment gaps that further deteriorate health outcomes. A Kaiser Family Foundation poll revealed that 61% of Black adults are concerned about affording prescription drugs, compared to 50% of White adults,

highlighting the urgency for legislative action. In addition, the CDC reported that over 9 million Americans aged 18-64 skip doses, take smaller amounts, or delay refills due to cost. This practice disproportionately affects lower-income Black families, leading to worsened health conditions and higher long-term healthcare costs.

Black Marylanders are also more likely to rely on state health programs than their White counterparts. As prescription costs rise, these programs face increased strain, leading to delays in care and formularies that may exclude critical medications. By reducing drug prices through regulatory oversight, HB0424 will provide direct benefits to Black Marylanders who depend on Medicaid and other public health programs to afford necessary treatments.

Rather than imposing a blanket price cap, HB0424 adopts an equitable approach by establishing a Prescription Drug Affordability Board. This board will thoroughly assess and evaluate drug costs before setting upper payment limits, ensuring that price regulations are based on real affordability challenges. Additionally, the board's structure allows for continuous oversight, meaning it can adjust pricing policies in response to market changes—avoiding the risks of a rigid, outdated price cap that could become ineffective over time.

By prioritizing affordability, healthcare equity, and economic relief for communities most affected by high drug prices, HB0424 advances the principles of justice and fairness. The bill reflects the Caucus' commitment to tackling systemic healthcare disparities and advocating for reforms that uplift Black Marylanders.

House Bill 424 represents a critical step in making prescription medications more affordable and accessible for all Marylanders. It balances public health needs with fiscal responsibility while ensuring that Maryland's most vulnerable populations receive the care they deserve. For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports House Bill 424 and urges this committee to make a favorable report.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland