

Testimony in Support of HB0060
Delegate Patterson

Good afternoon. My name is Nikia K. Vaughan and I serve as the Executive Director of the Maryland Sickle Cell Disease Association.

I am here today in strong support of House Bill 0060. I offer this testimony not only as a professional leader in the sickle cell community but also as a mother of two children living with chronic illnesses including sickle cell disease. This issue is deeply personal for me.

Recently I spent time with students I call the invisible warriors at Morgan State University. These are capable driven students managing a lifelong unpredictable disease while pursuing higher education. During these conversations a senior shared that some professors do not allow excused absences or makeup work even when students are hospitalized or experiencing a sickle cell crisis.

One student shared something even more troubling. They explained that they attended class while actively in pain because they feared the academic consequences of being absent. No student should ever have to choose between their health and their education yet for students living with sickle cell disease this choice happens far too often.

As a parent this is deeply concerning. My daughter will be a freshman in high school next year. She is an aspiring artist living with sickle cell disease and has already accomplished so much including serving as the inaugural in house artist at the inaugural Sickle Cell Summit as a guest of US Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra. She dreams of attending the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore.

As she becomes college bound I think about the systems that will either support her or fail her when she becomes ill. Will she be believed Will compassion guide policy Or will she be expected to push through pain to prove she belongs.

House Bill 0060 is about dignity equity and access. It ensures institutions of higher education have clear policies informed faculty and meaningful education so students with sickle cell disease are supported not penalized.

As both the Executive Director of the Maryland Sickle Cell Disease Association and a parent I urge a favorable report on HB0060. Our students deserve learning environments that honor both their potential and their health.

Thank you for your time and consideration.