

HB 60: Sickle Cell Disease - Institutions of Higher Education - Policies, Procedures, and Educational Campaigns

Position: Favorable

To the Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is **Loretta Hoffman**, and I am the mother and primary caregiver of a **sickle cell warrior who matriculated through higher education**. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of **House Bill 60** because I have personally experienced the consequences of inadequate and inconsistent support for sickle cell warriors navigating Maryland's colleges and universities.

Caring for a sickle cell warrior in higher education is far more complex than most institutions recognize. My child has endured unpredictable pain crises, severe fatigue, frequent medical appointments, and hospitalizations while being held to rigid academic expectations. Despite medical documentation and repeated communication, our family often encountered delays, confusion, and resistance when requesting reasonable accommodations. Each academic term became a cycle of advocacy, stress, and uncertainty rather than a stable and supportive educational experience.

As a caregiver, I was forced to fill gaps the institution should have addressed—coordinating with faculty, explaining the medical realities of sickle cell disease, appealing accommodation decisions, and ensuring my child did not fall through the cracks. The absence of a clear, standardized accommodation process placed an unnecessary burden not only on my sickle cell warrior, but also on me as a parent and caregiver striving to balance health, academics, and survival.

House Bill 60 would meaningfully change this experience for families like mine. By establishing clearer expectations and accountability for institutions of higher education, this bill ensures accommodations for sickle cell warriors and others with chronic and genetic conditions are timely, consistent, and proactive rather than reactive. HB 60 recognizes that sickle cell warriors do not need lowered academic standards—they need equitable access and reasonable flexibility so their health does not jeopardize their education.

At its heart, this bill addresses a critical injustice. Sickle cell disease disproportionately affects Black and underserved communities, where existing gaps in our educational systems can turn a medical crisis into a permanent academic and economic setback. We cannot accept a reality where sickle cell warriors must sacrifice their education to manage their health, or where caregivers fight in isolation for simple accommodations. House Bill 60 affirms that Maryland's colleges and universities must include and actively support these students, ensuring their pathways are not blocked by institutional barriers. I respectfully urge you to advance this vital measure with a favorable report.

Thank you

Respectfully submitted,
Loretta Hoffman