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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 HB0060 - Sick Cell Disease - Institutions of Higher Education - Policies, Procedures, and Educational Campaigns

Good afternoon, Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser and Members of the House Appropriations Committee. For the record, I am Delegate Edith Patterson, sponsor of HB0060 Education – Public Health – Sick Cell Disease – Education and Awareness Campaign.

This legislation is inspired by a personal experience I had with a student afflicted by Sick Cell Disease (SCD) who was a senior at a Historically Black College in Maryland. During a crisis, she was unable to attend her classes, complete assignments, or engage fully in her education. She reached out to me for assistance, and her situation highlighted the profound challenges that students with SCD face in balancing their health and academic responsibilities.

As you may know, SCD is a chronic condition that can significantly impact students' academic performance and overall school experience. While most students with SCD have normal learning abilities when they are not experiencing symptoms, the unpredictable nature of the disease often creates unique challenges that require thoughtful accommodations and support. Frequent pain crises, fatigue, and other complications can lead to missed school days, difficulty concentrating, and lower academic performance if proper systems are not in place.

HB0060 seeks to address these challenges by encouraging the Maryland Department of Health to develop education and awareness campaigns to implement tailored programs and policies to support students with SCD, including accommodations; collaboration with healthcare providers is critical to ensuring that schools are prepared to manage a student's medical needs, particularly during pain crises; and awareness and training to educate teachers, administrators, and staff about SCD. Awareness training would help staff identify symptoms, respond appropriately during crises, and better understand the needs of students with SCD.

Given the significant challenges faced by students with SCD, this legislation is an essential step toward ensuring that schools provide the accommodations and support these students need to succeed academically. By requiring the Department of Health to create individualized plans, promote awareness training, and establish consistent access to medical resources, Maryland can improve the educational experiences and outcomes for students with SCD and serve as a model for other states.

In summary, HB0060 is a straightforward yet impactful measure to support students at institutions of higher education who have Sick Cell Disease. It addresses a critical gap in educational equity and ensures that students with SCD have the resources and support they need to thrive academically despite the challenges posed by their condition. I respectfully urge you to give HB0060 a favorable report. Thank you for your consideration,
Edith Patterson, Charles County