

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Maryland House Health and Government Operations Committee—thank you for your time today.

My name is Charlie Kelly. I'm a certified orthotist and prosthetist practicing in Annapolis, and I'm here in strong support of HB 445, The So Every Body Can Move Act.

Orthoses are not “nice-to-haves.” They are medically prescribed devices that protect joints, stabilize weak or misaligned limbs, reduce falls, and prevent secondary complications. In my clinical practice, I see orthoses function as lifelines for people managing neuromuscular and musculoskeletal disorders and acquired conditions—because without them, mobility and independence can disappear quickly.

Here's what this looks like in a real patient's life:

One of my patients has an inoperable brain tumor and has developed hemiparesis. His therapy isn't only about “walking better”—it's about keeping his brain engaged and fighting functional decline. He plays the violin as part of his rehabilitation plan, because it stimulates the affected areas of his brain and drives repetition, coordination, and motor relearning. But to play, he needs an activity-specific upper-extremity orthosis that positions and stabilizes his weak limb so he can safely practice. Right now, that device is not covered, because it is too easily mislabeled as optional. For him, it's not optional—it's treatment. It's the difference between being shut out of therapy and being able to participate in it.

The purpose of SB 276 / HB 445 is to expand current law to include coverage for activity-specific orthotic devices when they are medically necessary. This matters because “activity-specific” does not mean “recreational.” It means clinically appropriate for the real-world demands of rehabilitation and function.

A single “everyday” brace often cannot safely meet every medical demand placed on a body. The forces, speed, balance reactions, sweat and water exposure, and range-of-motion needs are different when someone is doing therapy-based cycling, aquatic therapy, strengthening, or higher-level gait training. When patients are forced into a one-brace-for-everything approach, they often compensate, overuse other joints, develop skin breakdown, or stop doing the very activities their care team prescribed—because it becomes too painful or too dangerous.

SB 276 clarifies that covered orthoses include all orthoses a treating provider determines are medically necessary to complete activities of daily living, essential job-related activities, or to perform physical activities including running, biking, swimming, and strength training—because these activities are often part of a prescribed treatment plan and are essential to maintaining whole-body health and limb function.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 276 / HB 445. Thank you for your consideration, and I'm happy to answer any questions.