

Dear Chairwoman Bagnall and members of the House Health Committee,

My name is Advika Dani and I am a preventive medicine resident physician working in the obesity medicine clinic at Johns Hopkins. Today, I am speaking as a physician who has been able to follow the journeys of dozens of patients with obesity. Obesity is a serious disease with life-threatening complications. Just like how untreated high blood pressure can lead to chronic kidney disease, untreated obesity can lead to strokes, cancer, and heart attacks among many other deadly outcomes. As per the CDC, approximately one-third of adults in Maryland are obese and are vulnerable to these chronic diseases. The good news is, is that now we have effective treatment, including GLP-1s.

With GLP-1 treatment, I have seen multiple patients with remarkable decreases in their cholesterol levels and blood pressure, as well as essentially reversal of diabetes with their H1Ac blood markers returning to non-diabetic levels. These effects are unprecedented and are a testament to how far medical innovation and research have come. However, we are struggling to overcome the barrier in between patients and this life-saving medication. I'll tell the story of a patient I just saw recently. She had struggled with her weight her entire life. She tried countless diets and workout plans, but she did not have the tools to fight against her own body's pathophysiology working against her. GLP-1 treatment was the key. It was not that she suddenly had more willpower or determination, but that she finally had the right treatment for her disease. Would we expect someone's willpower alone to decrease their high blood pressure? No, they need anti-hypertensive medication. Why can't we think about obesity in the same way? This patient lost more than 30% of her body weight and reversed her prediabetes and high cholesterol on a GLP-1. Then, her insurance changed their mind, and she was faced with a choice of paying over \$500 a month for her medication or reversing all of her progress. What would she do if her insurance stopped covering her blood pressure medication because her blood pressure was now controlled? Our patients deserve better than having to face these choices. Tomorrow, you have an opportunity to help the patients trying to access life-saving treatment for obesity. Please support the Maryland Medical Assistance Program with Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity.

Thank you for taking this matter seriously and I ask for you to support HB 813.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Advika Dani', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Advika Dani, MD

Johns Hopkins General Preventive Medicine Residency