



PARTNERSHIP TO ADVANCE
**Cardiovascular
Health**

February 25, 2020

The Honorable Delores G. Kelley
Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Legislative Services Building
90 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass
Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee
Legislative Services Building
90 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Vice Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Legislative Services Building
90 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Vice Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee
Legislative Services Building
90 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Support for SB 0952 and HB 1359 – Health Insurance – Requirements for Establishing Step Therapy Protocol and Requesting Exceptions

Dear Senators and Delegates,

On behalf of the Partnership to Advance Cardiovascular Health (PACH), I am writing in support of SB 0952 and HB 1359. These bills that will help patients access appropriate and timely treatment by providing clear guidelines on health care plans' use of step therapy, a common utilization management tool.

PACH is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit advocacy coalition of stakeholder groups that represent patients, patient advocates, health care providers and medical researchers in the cardiovascular space. On behalf of its members, PACH advocates for patient access to FDA-approved therapies and promotes innovation in cardiovascular health care for the millions of Americans who are at high risk for heart disease. SB 0952 and HB 1359 would protect patients' access to care by establishing guidelines around health insurers' use of step therapy protocols, helping to ensure patient-centered care and preserving physician-patient decision making health care treatment.

Step therapy is a utilization management tool known as "fail first" that requires patients to follow an insurance dictated treatment path that favors low cost medicines over other treatment options. It is used by insurers as a way to contain health care cost but does not recognize that that treatment may not be appropriate for a patient, may have already been tried and failed or is contraindicated to other

medications being taken. Patients are prevented from accessing the medication prescribed by their health care provider, leading to delays in accessing treatment for many patients.

Limits on step therapy protocols are especially important to patients with cardiovascular disease, the number one killer in the state of Maryland, the United States, and around the world. Our nation is currently in a health crisis and today's CVD patient is drastically different from those of previous decades. Patients are younger and have comorbidities such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity. The window for prevention has become much smaller and optimal treatment for patients must begin as soon as possible.

More and more patients are being considered high-risk by health care providers, and delays in appropriate treatment for them are life-threatening. One of the most egregious examples where market access has been systemically restricted for consumers is the PCSK9 inhibitor (PCSK9i) drug class. These medications have come to market in the last five years and have proven to significantly reduce the rates of heart attack, stroke and even death. More recently, data has shown that PCSK9is can also reverse atherosclerosis. This medication is very effective for those with severely elevated LDL-cholesterol, who have familial hypercholesterolemia (FH), and who are unable to tolerate first-line LDL lowering therapies. For some patients, other medicines have proven to be ineffective.

SB 0952 and HB 1359 provide guardrail reforms that give the health care provider and patient a path to satisfy step therapy protocols by outlining clear exception criteria and an exception request approval timeline. PCSK9is are not for every patient, but when it is deemed necessary by a physician to save their patients' lives, timely access is important. This legislation does not prevent insurance companies from using step therapy, nor does it limit the number of steps required by the insurer. However, it serves as an important step toward protecting the provider-patient relationship that is critical to successful care by providing clear guidelines, improved accessibility, and faster response times to step therapy appeals.

Health care innovations, like PCSK9is, have revolutionized the management of CVD. Going forward [patients can expect more and new therapies that aim to reduce and, in the long term, eliminate CVD altogether.. If insurers are allowed to install barriers to accessing these therapies, we will never reach our population health goals to ensure citizens live long, healthy lives. Access to these important treatments now, along with primary prevention measures for our future generations, is crucial to tackling our nation's CV health crisis.

On behalf of the Partnership to Advance Cardiovascular Health and its coalition members, we ask that you support SB 0952 and HB 1359 to create patient access protections in the use step therapy procedures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ryan Gough". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ryan" and last name "Gough" clearly distinguishable.

Ryan Gough
Executive Director