



February 27, 2020

The Honorable Shane Pendergrass
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
6 Bladen Street
Room 241
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: House Bill 1359 – Support as Amended

Dear Chairperson Pendergrass,

On behalf of the nearly 14,000 U.S. members of the American Academy of Dermatology Association (“Academy”), we write in strong support of the amended version of SB 1359. Dermatologists diagnose and treat more than 3,000 diseases, including skin cancer, psoriasis, immunologic diseases and many genetic disorders. As physicians who are on the front lines fighting skin cancer and treating numerous skin diseases, we believe this legislation would be a critical step to ensuring that patients can access the therapies prescribed by their physician. Pursuant to SB 1359, health insurers would be required to expeditiously grant a step therapy override determination request if, in the professional judgment of the prescribing physician, the step therapy requirement would be medically inappropriate for that patient. We urge members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee to support amended HB 1359.

Step therapy protocols, a cost containment tool used by health insurance plans, require patients to try one or more prescription drugs before coverage is provided for a drug selected by the patient’s health care provider. We understand the need to contain health care costs, but we are concerned that step therapy strategies for medication and other treatment selection have the potential to impact patient outcomes and quality of life.

Requiring patients to try and fail treatments jeopardizes the health of patients, potentially resulting in dangerous consequences. In some instances, health plans force patients to return to the same treatments that have proven to be ineffective when tried previously under a different health plan. The decision to change plans may occur through no fault of the patients but rather an employer’s decision to change plans.

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Further, step therapy interferes with the patient-physician relationship by preventing dermatologists from prescribing drugs they know will provide the best treatment results in the most effective manner. SB 1359 would ensure that step therapy protocols used by health plans in Maryland will preserve the health care provider's right to make treatment decisions in the best interest of the patient. Physicians know their patients' medical history, which enables them to identify potential contraindications and life-threatening adverse reactions. Retaining physicians' medical judgement in patients' treatment plans is a cost-effective way to prevent health care dollars from being used on medications that are not effective. It also prevents patients from a prolonged treatment that includes scheduling multiple visits to their physician and spending money on prescription medications that are not effective.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide written comments on this important public health issue and urge your support for SB 1359 as amended. As physicians, our number one priority is the health and welfare of our patients. The enactment of this legislation will improve access to prescription medications that are in the best interest of the patient. For further information, please contact Lisa Albany, director, state policy for the Academy at lalbany@aad.org (202) 842-3555.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "George Hruza". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

George J. Hruza, MD, MBA

President

American Academy of Dermatology Association