

# Dr. Kate Sugarman

11909 Enid Drive, Potomac, MD 20854

Cell: 301-343-5724, E-mail: katesugarman@hotmail.com

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Thank you, Chairwoman McIntosh, Vice Chairman Chang, and members of the Appropriations Committee, I am pleased to support House Bill (HB) 15, which would create the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

I am a family physician by training and have practiced in the Maryland/D.C area for over 17 years. Currently, I work with Unity Health Care as a primary care physician. I have extensive experience providing health care and advocating for my immigrant patients. I teach medical students, residents and other physicians about providing culturally appropriate health care, especially for immigrant patients who are seeking asylum. Due to this experience, I am on faculty at Georgetown Law School, assisting with their asylum clinic.

Throughout my career, providing care to the immigrant community has been tremendously rewarding and also challenging. This population faces many obstacles to obtaining quality care. Some include language barriers, lack of culturally appropriate care, high costs, and lack of health insurance. Outside the health facility, many of my immigrant patients struggle with gaining employment opportunities and access to social services. As a result, this results in poor health outcomes and lower quality of life.

Asian/Pacific Islanders, who make up close to 6% of the state's population, for instance, are 1.7 times more likely to be uninsured compared to the non-Latinex White population. The Latinex population in our state has tripled since 2000 and makes up approximately 10% of the total population. Latinex people in Maryland were three times more likely to not be able to afford seeing a doctor, and were five times more likely to be without health insurance, than Non-Latinex Whites. Furthermore, trends have consistently shown increases in mortality rates for cancer, strokes, heart disease, and diabetes for our immigrant communities.

I think of my patient Enrique who came to the US on a work visa. He works in a very crowded poultry plant, which puts him at very high risk of getting infected with COVID19. He fears getting fired if he complains to his boss. President Biden just announced that occupational health and safety is going to be a top priority of his.

So many of my immigrant patients, like Enrique, require legal advice. Often, this advice can even be provided pro bono, but my patients would benefit by having a central office where they could go for coordinated advice.

We must do better. There are many gaps in services that are offered to immigrants, ranging from job opportunities to health care services. This population contributes so much to our society and yet, still awaits to be accepted in our society. We have a duty to ensure adequate

resources are in place for their success. Through the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, necessary services can be provided and improved systemically. It also displays Maryland's support toward our immigrant community.

House Bill 0015 is part of the solution that addresses disparities and makes sure the voices of the immigrant population are heard. This bill intends to create an organizational framework where immigrants are better connected to the resources they need to achieve success in our society. I respectfully urge the committee members to vote favorably on this bill.

Sincerely,  
Kate Sugarman M.D.

### Sources

*<https://www.astho.org/Programs/Health-Equity/Maryland-Health-Equity-Report/>*

*<https://health.maryland.gov/mhhd/Documents/Maryland-Hispanic-Health-Disparity-Data.pdf>*