



February 15, 2021

Maryland State Senate Finance Committee

SB 522: Public Health - Commission on Universal Health Care

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Senator Kelley, Vice-Chair Senator Feldman, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Our Revolution Maryland, I am writing to express our strong support for SB 522.

This bill will establish the Commission on Universal Health Care desperately needed for all people living in Maryland and proven by the significant 7,400 deaths of Marylanders from COVID-19. This death toll does not include countless lives lost from opioid overdoses from lack of the adequate funding for mental health issues and long-term recovery programs. The COVID-19 data has also proven again that the US Healthcare system including Maryland's "not for profit" system function as intended -- to discriminate against race, age, color, national origin, disability, sex (gender), religion, and disease. We are further witnessing the racial disparities now with the vaccine rollouts. These crimes against humanity are further crippling by a profit driven health system that creates medical debt and medical bankruptcies experienced in Maryland and across America.

This Bill will provide the structures for the composition, chair, and staffing of the Commission not with Health Industry executives; requiring the Commission to develop a plan for the State to establish, on or before January 1, 2024, a universal health care program to provide health benefits to all residents of the State through a single-payer system; authorizing the Commission, the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange, and the Maryland Department of Health to apply for certain waivers; and all essential pieces for every person in Maryland to benefit from healthcare as a human right. Over thirty percent of the entire MD State Budget goes to healthcare, and hospitals receive ample Maryland tax subsidies for low and middle-income households. Yet, there is no disputing the statistics that not all people living in Maryland have access to quality and adequate healthcare.

Now in 2021, this Bill and a Commission on Universal Health Care are long overdue. The accumulation of all of the Covid-19 and opioid deaths, crippling patient medical debt that hospitals sell as a revenue stream, predatory behaviors that force sick patients into medical

bankruptcies and actual denying sick people care or making them skip treatments all because of profits, we have to ask ourselves:

- How many more people need to die beyond 7,400 by COVID-19 or opioid overdoses before access to universal healthcare is part of all elected Leaders conversations at every level of Government to save lives and the economy?
- If not in a global pandemic, when will elected Leaders at all levels of Government change the narrative about the moral imperative and essential human right to universal healthcare to save lives, to end medical debt, and to stop medical bankruptcy because of illness?
- Without universal healthcare, how do Maryland children go back into classrooms when they can bring COVID-19 home from school that could create medical debt, medical bankruptcy or worse kill their parents and family?
- When are patients or families given the list of costs per medical procedure so they can make budgetary decisions in the medical moment? Or, before death? Is a life worth the \$10,000 procedure knowing the medical debt can't be repaid? These decision making processes are cruel and inhuman in Maryland's health system and systems across America.
- Finally, how much money in campaigns donations to American politicians is worth denying access to universal healthcare to Marylanders and American people thereby committing crimes against humanity?

We respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on the Commission on Universal Health Care (HB0470/SB0522). Thank you.

Sincerely,

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