

TESTIMONY FOR HB0470: Commission on Universal Health Care

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Ruth

Committee: Health and Government Operations

Organization Submitting: Lower Shore Progressive Caucus

Person Submitting: Jared Schablein, LSPC Chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0470 on behalf of the Lower Shore Progressive Caucus. The Caucus is a political and activist organization on the Eastern Shore, unaffiliated with any political party, committed to empowering working people by building a Progressive movement on the Lower Eastern Shore.

Healthcare is one of the biggest issues facing rural communities like the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. Our residents tend to be older and have more health ailments than urban areas around the state. On top of that, the Eastern Shore of Maryland has the highest rates of individuals who are uninsured and underinsured in the state. These statistics show that large percentages of our community fall through the cracks and are unable to get the treatment that they need under our current healthcare system. Finally, the Lower Eastern Shore often has a lower standard of care than urban areas in the state. Many of our residents are forced to drive to the Western Shore or a different state to receive the care they need if they can even afford it. These disparities are made worse for our communities of color who often feel the brunt of it. In Wicomico County, the infant mortality rate two times higher for black babies compared to white.

These health inequities based on race, ethnicity, disability, economic status, and place of residence have persisted throughout the state and the COVID-19 pandemic has only deepened these inequities. The need to address and improve health outcomes in underserved areas of our state such as the Lower Shore is imperative, especially when people with chronic conditions are less able to get the care and treatment they desperately need.

To make matters worse, many Maryland workers and their dependents lost their healthcare in layoffs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been especially bad on the Lower Shore where many of our industries have been decimated by Covid. The current healthcare system does not ease burdens on Marylanders from the Eastern Shore to Western Maryland and everywhere in between. Our current system also fails to address the increasing health concerns of our modern life and world. All Marylanders should have the right to preventative care and comprehensive health care regardless of assets, employment status, race, ethnicity, zip code, or any other determining factor.

For most Marylanders, the costs of health care are daunting. Emergency room visits are costly enough, but when surveying the costs of health care plans, the cheapest out-of-pocket expenses for a single adult who makes \$25,000 was \$2,700 and the cheapest monthly price was \$42.27. Some plans could require a \$10,000 deductible. One plan even required residents to pay \$310.24 a month. A 2015 survey found that the average hospital stay costs \$14,200. Costs for appointments with primary care physicians are also a large problem. An intake appointment for uninsured people has hovered around \$100. That is 1/10th of a monthly paycheck for someone who lives on the poverty line.

The solution to the many issues above is passing HB0470. By establishing the Commission on Universal Health Care we can finally develop a plan for the State to establish a universal health care program to provide health benefits to all residents of the State and lead the nation in healthcare reform. For that reason, the Lower Shore Progressive Caucus urges legislators to stand with workers by supporting this bill and giving it a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.