



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Acting Secretary

March 11, 2021

The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: HB 1319 – Health Insurance – Lyme Disease and Related Tick-Borne Illnesses – Long-Term Antibiotic Treatment – Letter of Information

Dear Chair Pendergrass and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is submitting this letter of information for House Bill (HB) 1319 – Health Insurance – Lyme Disease and Related Tick-Borne Illnesses – Long-Term Antibiotic Treatment. This bill would require insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations to provide coverage for long-term antibiotic treatment of chronic Lyme disease and related tick-borne illnesses when it is prescribed by a licensed physician.

Antibiotics are important treatments for many conditions; however, unnecessary antibiotic use provides no benefit to patients and can put them at risk of adverse events. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report provides illustrative examples of severe complications that occurred in patients who received long-term antibiotic treatment because of a diagnosis of chronic Lyme disease¹. The report documents cases of septic shock, osteomyelitis, Clostridium difficile colitis, and other serious and sometimes life-threatening complications. The CDC notes that these outcomes are particularly concerning because at least five randomized placebo-controlled studies have shown that long-term antibiotic treatment, particularly treatment with long-term intravenous antibiotics, does not substantially improve long-term outcomes for patients diagnosed with chronic Lyme disease. The CDC report also raises concerns that after diagnosis of chronic Lyme disease has been made, other causes of a patient's symptoms might remain undiagnosed and untreated.

I hope this information is useful. If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me at webster.ye@maryland.gov / (410) 260-3190 or Heather Shek, Director of Governmental Affairs at heather.shek@maryland.gov or at the same phone number.

Sincerely,

Webster Ye
Assistant Secretary, Health Policy

¹ Marzec NS, et al, "Serious Bacterial Infections Acquired During Treatment of Patients Given a Diagnosis of Chronic Lyme Disease – United States," Centers for Disease Control Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 16 June 2017: Vol. 66, No. 23, 2 March 2021 <<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6623a3.htm>>.