

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

HB 849 Public Health - Medical Records - Fees

March 2, 2021

House Health and Government Operations Committee

My name is Charles Hollins. I work as Benefits Case Manager for Maryland Benefits Counseling Network, a non-profit agency funded by the State of Maryland. In that capacity, I assist local beneficiaries in dealing with the arcane rules and regulations which govern Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income. One of my tasks is also to assist individuals in applying for those benefits.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 849 which will eliminate fees for medical records for people applying for public benefits.

This bill is critical in my efforts to assist seriously mentally ill people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness apply for public benefits. One of the criteria for a successful SSI application is that the potential beneficiary must have countable income that is no more than \$794 a month and resources under \$2,000. The charging of any kind of fee for medical records therefore presents a hugely significant barrier to an individual whose indigence is in large part a reason behind the application for the benefit.

While there are no such restrictive resource requirements for SSDI, it must be noted that individuals apply for the benefit at a time when they are unable to work and earn a substantial income. Again, the obligation to submit a fee for medical records when one has limited income has been, and remains, a huge impediment to those individuals seeking to secure a measure of financial stability as they deal with the challenges of living with a disability.

Therefore, as HB 849 would ensure that low-income Marylanders can access the records they need to secure vital public benefits I support HB 849 and urge a favorable report.