

February 10, 2022

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chairman
The Honorable Cheryl Kagan, Vice-Chairwoman
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 2 West Wing
Annapolis Maryland, MD 21401

RE: NATIONAL COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION IN SUPPORT OF SB355

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and committee members:

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Community Pharmacists Association in support of **SB 355**. This legislation would increase patient access to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) pre-exposure (PrEP) and post-exposure (PEP) medications, and result in HIV related cost saving while combating the spread of the virus by identifying the virus early and preventing disease progression.

NCPA represents the interest of American's community pharmacists, including owners of more than 19,400 independent community pharmacies across the United States and 395 independent pharmacies in Maryland. These Maryland pharmacies filled over 22 million prescriptions last year, impacting the lives of thousands of patients in your state.

Over 90% of Americans live within five miles of a community pharmacy¹. More than any other segment of the pharmacy industry, independent community pharmacists are often located in the most underserved rural and urban areas and are frequently the most accessible healthcare providers in many communities and are critical for the provision of immunizations and other preventative care service in the community.. in addition, community pharmacists are proud to play a vital role in Maryland's efforts to increase access to PrEP and PEP medications statewide. Access to pharmacy care services along with HIV PrEP and PEP medications will play a critical role in combating the HIV epidemic and staving off costly downstream medical interventions.

NCPA applauds the mandatory coverage language in SB355. Mandatory coverage provisions for pharmacists provided preventative health care services is paramount to the intended success of SB355. NCPA emphasizes that pharmacists undergo a minimum of six years of comprehensive undergraduate and professional education. Pharmacists' training in clinical services, disease state management, interpretation of lab data will be appropriately utilized and compensated for recognizing pharmacists as a competent arm in combating the HIV epidemic and improving patient's lives within the state of Maryland.

¹ NCPDP Pharmacy File, ArcGIS Census Tract File, NACDS Economics Department.

Like other medical professions, the pharmacy profession has evolved from dispensing and product reimbursement based industry to a profession with the *training* and patient *relationships* to provide outcomes-based services and participate in care coordination efforts.² NCPA supports SB 355 required the Maryland Board of Pharmacy to adopt an approved pharmacists training program for PrEP and PEP medications and services. The training program will aim to address the challenges and knowledge gaps, including but not limited to, counseling unique populations, recommending appropriate vaccinations, understanding HIV disease state, HIV medications along with how and when to exercise appropriate patient follow-up, and referring the patient to necessary resources and healthcare providers.

Such a training program will optimize efforts in supporting all facets of the patient's experience relating to PrEP and PEP services and ensure a high standard of care in carrying out the responsibilities aligned with lowering rates of HIV infection throughout the state.

SB 355 would increase patient access to HIV PrEP and PEP medications and aid in reducing spending related to HIV care while challenging the progression of the disease. To protect Marylanders, we respectfully ask you to support SB 335. If you have any questions about the information contained in this letter or wish to discuss the issue in greater detail, please do not hesitate to contact me at belawoe.akwakoku@ncpa.org or (703) 600-1179.

Sincerely,



Belawoe Akwakoku
State Government Affairs Manager
National Community Pharmacists Association

² Troy Trygstad, *Payment Reform Meets Pharmacy Practice and Education Transformation*, 78 North Carolina Med. J. 3 at 173 -176 (May-June 2017), available at <http://www.ncmedicaljournal.com/content/8/3/173.full.pdf+html>