



Testimony of

**Joseph L. Wright, MD, MPH
Vice President and Chief Health Equity Officer
University of Maryland Medical System**

**Adjunct Professor of Pediatrics and Health Policy & Management
University of Maryland Schools of Medicine and Public Health**

**Maryland General Assembly, Senate Finance Committee – HB 1082
Thursday, March 31st, 2022**

Dear Honorable Chair Kelley,

I am Dr. Joseph Wright, Vice-President and Chief Health Equity Officer at the University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS). I urge you to vote in favor of House Bill 1082 primarily because it is good public policy for health information and services to be understandable and accessible by all Marylanders. Healthy People 2030, the nation's health agenda, has the overarching goal to eliminate health disparities, achieve health equity, and attain health literacy to improve the health and well-being of all. In addition, the bill advances two major elements of Maryland's health care agenda. First, because health literacy is so closely tied to inequities in health care, the bill advances our health equity goals. Second, increasing personal and community health literacy is essential if we are to succeed with Maryland's Total Cost of Care Model. My professional charge at UMMS is to identify and eliminate disparities and advance equity in care. As noted in a recently authored Baltimore Sun commentary, our healthcare systems have received major wake-up calls about barriers that create structural inequities. Health literacy issues are part of that wake-up call. When health systems don't communicate clearly with the people they serve, we create communication and information barriers.

UMMS hospitals serve diverse patient populations, and every day, we see the consequences when we don't communicate clearly and patients and their caregivers don't understand their health conditions. For example, we see people returning to our emergency departments because they didn't understand the discharge instructions. We also see benefits when communication among providers and consumers is clear and consistent because care transitions from hospital to home can happen smoothly. HB 1082 provides many remedies for communication inequities. It provides health literacy expertise to organizations throughout the state, so they have a prepared workforce, plain language health materials, and transparent criteria to guide public communication. We are fortunate that Maryland has a unique entity to serve as an information hub - - the Horowitz Center for Health Literacy. They have the expertise that will help health systems try demonstration projects and measure outcomes that spur innovation in patient-centered approaches and target population health goals. The bill provides for an annual report to the legislature so that the State can monitor and discuss how to make additional progress.

Maryland has ambitious goals with the Total Cost of Care model that can only be achieved if our patients have accurate and accessible information. But, even if we succeed on the technical measures, but don't attend to the equity issues like health literacy, we won't have the patient-centered health system we aspire to and that Marylanders deserve.

HB 1082 sets us on the right path and I urge your support. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph L. Wright, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joseph L. Wright, MD, MPH
Vice President and Chief Health Equity Officer
University of Maryland Medical System
Adjunct Professor of Pediatrics and Health Policy & Management
University of Maryland Schools of Medicine and Public Health