



February 22, 2022

The Honorable Delores Kelley
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Senate Bill 682 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Gender-Affirming Treatment (Trans Health Equity Act of 2022) - FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Kelley and Senate Finance Committee members,

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) is an advocacy organization that mobilizes community members for the health, dignity, and safety of people targeted by the war on drugs and anti- sex worker policies. As a certified Overdose Response Program, naloxone distributor, and syringe service program we have provided essential health care services across the state for years. For this reason and more we support SB682, the Trans Health Equity Act of 2022.

Maryland continues to rely on 20-year old standards of care to attempt to meet the needs of its transgender and gender diverse residents. In turn, our state categorically denies dozens of gender-affirming services, all of which are federally approved and reimbursable. Without access to these services we are pushing vulnerable trans and gender diverse Marylanders further into the margins by exposing them to more employment and housing discrimination, harassment, and interpersonal violence.

Increasing access to gender-affirming surgeries is a community harm reduction strategy and supported by public health research. Studies have shown that transgender and gender diverse people with a history of gender-affirming surgery have significantly lower rates of behavioral health concerns such as substance use, suicidal ideation,¹ and sharing non-sterile syringes needed for gender-affirming medical care.² Insurance is proven to be a significant barrier to accessing hygienic supplies and wrap-around health care services to address behavioral and physical health needs. Furthermore, studies and cost benefit analyses show that access to sterile supplies saves money, largely from averted HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C infections.³

¹ Almazan AN, Keuroghlian AS. Association Between Gender-Affirming Surgeries and Mental Health Outcomes. *JAMA Surg.* 2021;156(7):611–618. doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2021.0952

² Jennifer L. Glick, Katherine M. Andrinopoulos, Katherine P. Theall, and Carl Kendall. Tiptoeing Around the System: Alternative Healthcare Navigation Among Gender Minorities in New Orleans. *Transgender Health* 2018 3:1, 118-126

³ Australian Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging. Return on Investment in Needle and Syringe Programs in Australia.

The healthcare community needs to eliminate access barriers and support harm reduction strategies. Gender-affirming surgeries should be made available for transgender and gender diverse people who seek them, and Maryland must remove barriers to gender-affirming surgery such as insurance exclusions for such care.

It is time for Maryland to join a cohort of over 10 states and the District of Columbia who provide comprehensive, gender-affirming care under Medicaid. BHRC asks that the Senate Finance Committee give SB682 a favorable report.

For more information about Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition or our position, please contact our Director of Mobilization, Rajani Gudlavalleti at rajani@baltimoreharmreduction.org