

March 22, 2022

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing in support of **H.B. 1082**, a bill sponsored by Delegates Peña-Melnyk, Cullison, and Hill that designates the University of Maryland's Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy as the State's Consumer Health Information Hub and requires state and local agencies to use plain language in their communications to the public regarding health, safety, and social service benefits. I am a current Masters of Public Health student at the University of Maryland School of Public Health and unaffiliated with the Horowitz Center. I support this bill as it has the potential to address some of the major obstacles public health professionals, communities, and governments have faced in controlling the transmission of COVID-19 in the last two years.

As stated in the bill and reiterated during the HGO committee's hearing, health literacy is a crucial component of public health, safety, and health equity. It was noted during the meeting that improvements in health literacy can advance the mission of Maryland's Total Cost of Care model by improving the likelihood individuals will adhere to medication and chronic disease management regimens. Furthermore, numerous bills have been introduced and passed relating to health disparities and equity, including one establishing the Maryland Commission on Health Equity last year, showing the state's commitment to addressing equity. H.B. 1082 has the potential to further the state's goals and initiatives of decreasing both healthcare costs and disparities by providing health information in a manner that is usable and understandable by the average person. Providing accurate, timely, and easily comprehensible information can reduce misinformation, a growing problem that has affected the way individuals understand and believe health information. H.B. 1082 empowers the people of Maryland to combat misinformation by providing public communications and documents in plain language and improving health literacy across the state.

We cannot expect people to not fall victim to misinformation if they cannot easily access and comprehend trusted information. With the Horowitz Center for Health Literacy, our state already has an excellent resource that has been working with other organizations to advance health literacy, making this an excellent opportunity to capitalize on existing resources to ensure all Marylanders are actually able to find and understand information related to health, safety, and social service benefits. No one should need a degree in biology, public health, or law to understand the health information their local and state officials share with the community, the coverage and costs included in their health insurance plan, or to complete the required documents to apply for assistance and benefits. There is little point in allocating resources to establish and support health and equity initiatives if the people the programs are designed to assist cannot find, understand, or trust the information.

We have each seen firsthand the true cost of low health literacy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic - both financially and in more devastating terms of widespread morbidity and mortality because individuals simply did not know and did not trust the ever-changing health guidance. We need a better way to communicate health and safety information to people of all health literacy

levels. As such, H.B.1082 should be seen as a step toward preparedness for the next health and safety emergency, and I urge each member to vote in favor of H.B.1082 in committee and on the House floor.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony,

Courtney Cann

Hyattsville, Maryland

MPH candidate | University of Maryland School of Public Health,  
Health Policy Analysis & Evaluation