



## Senate Bill 634 - Health Insurance – Home Test Kits for Sexually Transmitted Diseases – Required Coverage

### Sponsor Testimony

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Chair Kelley and Vice Chair Feldman:

My name is Roanna Kessler and I am the Chief Medical Director for Johns Hopkins University Student Health & Well-Being. I oversee the campus primary care services for all of Johns Hopkins University students and learners. Today I am testifying in my professional capacity in support of Senate Bill 634. The views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect the policies or positions of Johns Hopkins University/Johns Hopkins Health System.

The most recent CDC data (from 2018) estimates that on any given day 1 in 5 people in the U.S. have a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Almost half of new infections were among people aged 15-24 which is why this bill is particularly relevant to the college-aged population and the college health centers that serve them. Our providers know that many STIs are asymptomatic and would not be detected if there was no routine screening. Furthermore, if left untreated & undetected these infections continue to spread in the community and can lead to chronic medical issues.<sup>1,2</sup>

STI rates have been increasing nationwide over the last decade and the Maryland state data reflects the same trend.<sup>3</sup> According to the American College Health Association Sexual Health Services Survey, college health centers have also noticed upward trends in STI testing positivity, especially for Gonorrhea & Syphilis.<sup>4</sup>

In a typical year about 10% (over a 1,000) of our Homewood health center visits are STI related (this includes screening, symptoms, and treatment). There are probably many more students who never come through our doors because of stigma associated with STIs and fear of invasive exams to collect specimens. Many of our students would certainly prefer the privacy of testing from home. This is especially salient to our transgender & non-binary community who often avoid seeking healthcare due concerns about discrimination, resulting in postponement or avoidance of healthcare, and poor physical and mental health outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

We know the scope and consequences of the STI epidemic are significant, and efforts to date to address this have been insufficient. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated some innovative approaches to healthcare delivery such as increased use of telehealth, home test kits, and alternate settings for treatment.<sup>6</sup> By insurance covering the cost of at-home STI testing, Senate Bill 634 would reduce systemic



and financial barriers to receiving STI screening which aligns with the vision of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Sexually Transmitted Infections National Strategic Plan for the United States:

*“The United States will be a place where sexually transmitted infections are prevented and where every person has high-quality STI prevention, care, and treatment while living free from stigma and discrimination. This vision includes all people, regardless of age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, geographic location, or socioeconomic circumstance.”<sup>6</sup>*

On behalf of myself and other college health providers, I respectfully urge you to pass Senate Bill 634.

Thank you for your kind attention and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

#### References:

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5. Kcomt L, Gorey KM, Barrett BJ, McCabe SE. Healthcare avoidance due to anticipated discrimination among transgender people: A call to create trans-affirmative environments. *SSM Popul Health*. 2020;11:100608. Published 2020 May 28. doi:10.1016/j.ssmph.2020.100608
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