

SUPPORT SB 682
Senate Finance Committee
February 22, 2022
Testimony of Omar Harfouch MD MPH

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Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the chance to testify in support of Senate Bill 682.

I am a physician who cares for several transgender patients in Baltimore.

I am writing today to express my support for the Gender-Affirming Treatment/Trans Health Equity Act of 2022 as a comprehensive, thoughtful, cost-neutral proposal to improve the health and safety of the small group of 2,000 transgender Marylanders who are enrolled in Medicaid.

This bill ensures Maryland Medicaid provides medically necessary care based on up-to-date standards in line with other state and private insurance providers, as well as local and international guidelines for the treatment of transgender individuals. As a physician, I've seen gender-affirming care dramatically improve patients' mental health and wellbeing, reducing long-term physical and mental health complications. One of my patients was diagnosed with depression prior to me evaluating her for gender affirming hormones. Once we managed to start her hormone therapy, her depression had markedly improved and she no longer needed to be on antidepressants.

In particular, I appreciate how the bill seeks to resolve insurance gaps in gender-affirming care, such as electrolysis accompanying planned genital surgeries and speech language or "voice therapy" which has potential to promote safety from discrimination and violence which worsen mental health. These services are federally reimbursable by licensed providers, and as medical providers to Medicaid-insured patients, we can help patients access them safely and judiciously.

Please, I urge you to support SB 682 to make this medically necessary and life-saving care accessible for low-income Marylanders on Medicaid, just as it is under many private insurance plans.

Thank you very much for your consideration,

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