



SB728 – SUPPORT

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Access to Care Act: Health Insurance – Qualified Resident State Subsidy Program

Finance Committee

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Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Laura Atwood. I have lived in Maryland since 1999, and I represent Takoma Park Mobilization, an grassroots advocacy organization with a following of over 2500 people, active in environmental, justice, economic, and electoral matters. We are in SUPPORT of SB728.

I'm also testifying as a healthcare employee who's so often struck by how many health problems, with accompanying anguish and multidimensional costs, could be prevented. Finally, through a direct-service offshoot of Takoma Park Mobilization, I do volunteer work with immigrants and see how health issues are intertwined with so many other aspects of people's lives.

I'd like to share the story of one man, whom I'll call Mario, who was my home health patient a few years ago. I work as a home physical therapist with patients who are "homebound," or unable to tolerate going to a physical therapy clinic; I typically make 4-6 visits per day (this has continued throughout the pandemic), and people invite me into their homes and lives, hoping that I can help them get stronger and healthier. Normally people without insurance are simply absent from my worklife. But Mario had come through my organization's hospitals and we were able to make a very few unreimbursed visits; even this is uncommon.

Mario had lost insurance when he changed jobs, didn't qualify for Medicaid or ACA subsidies because of immigration status, and couldn't afford his cardiac medications (\$30/month). Yes, these stories are real, in the form of so many human beings. So he had a simultaneous heart attack and stroke, couldn't return to his restaurant job which included heavy lifting, and couldn't pay rent for his room in a family's home; the family (including elementary school children) relied on that income as well but didn't want to make him homeless. The man was in his early 50s and eager to work, but unable when I last saw him.

How much better, in so many ways, would it have been to prevent the cascade of devastation from Mario's lack of health insurance? We need to do what we can, going forward, to prevent others from facing his situation. SB728 is an important step.

Takoma Park Mobilization therefore urges a favorable report on SB728.