

Testimony in Support of HB 746
Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Gender-Affirming Treatment
Trans Health Equity Act of 2022
Health and Government Operations Committee
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Chair Pendergrass and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the chance to testify in support of House Bill 746.

Imagine you need a medically necessary procedure, but you are unable to receive it because you have Medicaid. Meanwhile, other Maryland residents with private insurance are able to have the same procedures covered. This is the case for many Marylanders who have Medicaid and are transgender, Two Spirit, or gender expansive. This policy directly discriminates against those with low income.

What impact does this have? On a population that already has high rates of underemployment and housing instability due to bias and discrimination, denying gender affirming procedures by denying coverage, increases the likelihood of not being hired for jobs, not being promoted in current places of employment, not being rented to, etc. (2015, James, et al).

We have worked with clients who have been harassed, sexually assaulted, and threatened with physical violence in their workplace when bigoted co-workers or customers have realized they are transgender. Some have had to quit their jobs due to management not protecting them in these situations or taking more proactive steps to ensure their safety. If Medicaid would have covered the medically necessary gender affirming procedures they wanted, they may not have had those experiences and may not have further trauma to cope with as a result.

In addition, Maryland Medicaid's requirements for receiving coverage are far more stringent than other plans, such as requiring that 2 letters are needed for all types of gender affirmation surgeries and one must be from a provider with a doctoral degree (despite the fact that other types of licenses are qualified to provide the letters). There are very few doctoral level providers in the state who provide these letters and are in network with Medicaid. These requirements, based on outdated standards of care and best practice, create further financial hardship and barriers to care for Marylanders living on low income.

We are health providers writing in support of HB 746 sponsored by Delegate Kaiser due to the unequivocal fact that barriers need to be reviewed and reduced for gender-diverse people to get

effective access to care they deserve. These health care barriers aid in the unfair and unequal prevention for access to proven care needs. The current practice standards are in many ways tied to WPATH Standards of Care 6, which is now 20 years old. Medicaid was once the standard for other insurance policies, but now it finds itself lagging behind private plans that appropriately don't require 2 letters or access to a provider with a doctoral degree.

As behavioral therapists, we directly see the impact of these barriers on the people we serve. A recent study found that a significant threshold of Baltimore transgender respondents who utilize public insurances showed a significant correlation between reduced mental health functioning and lack of access to medically necessary gender affirming care and procedures (2017, Cooney, et al). Not only is this lack of access clearly harmful for Maryland residents, it also puts an unnecessary strain on Medicaid mental health services by increasing the need for mental health stabilization. The removal of this bottleneck as supported in this bill could assist with better physiological and behavioral outcomes. It could also be more cost effective for our state.

This conversation is also important in light of the impact that the pandemic has had on our medical system. Many of our clients have experienced an increased lack of access to providers and facilities with the COVID surges over the last few years. These outdated Medicaid care requirements are an extra barrier for transgender Marylanders already affected by housing concerns, underemployment, discrimination, and a changing medical landscape still reeling from the effects of the pandemic. A vote for this bill could help to increase physical and mental health outcomes, improve Medicaid to modern standards of health practice, and still be cost-effective with requiring less specialized health services than the current laws. Let us do our jobs effectively as providers caring for Marylanders. Please support HB 746.

Thank you for your consideration,

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(Citation **Cooney E,* Malik M, Brevelle J-M, Wirtz AL, Poteat T.** Be the Conversation Study: Access to Gender Affirming Care as a Determinant of Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender Individuals. American Public Health Association Conference. Atlanta, Georgia: November 7, 2017.

trtnetwork.weekly.com/uploads/7/3/7/6/73764281/trtpres_btc_28feb2018.pdf

(Citation **James, Sandy E., Herman, Jody, Keisling, Mara, Mottet, Lisa, and Anafi, Ma'ayan.** 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS). Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2019-05-22. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR37229.v1>