



Maryland
Hospital Association

March 7, 2022

To: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair, House Health & Government Operations Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 1188 - Public Health - Sickle Cell Disease and Trait - Information for Individuals and Health Care Practitioners

Dear Chair Pendergrass:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 1188.

As part of MHA's [commitment to racial equity](#), Maryland hospitals are evaluating factors inside and outside of their organizations to promote racial equity and opportunities to address social determinants impacting Marylanders' health. We are working with members of our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Advisory Group and Health Equity Task Force to identify partners and external opportunities to support these efforts. Hospitals are committed to embracing culturally responsive strategies to address disparities in health outcomes to ensure all Marylanders can be as healthy as possible.

HB 1188 requires the Maryland Department of Health to establish and implement a system to provide information on the sickle cell trait (SCT) or the thalassemia trait to certain individuals. SCT impacts one in 12 Blacks or African Americans in the United States—almost three times that of their white counterparts.^{1,2} The thalassemia trait, while rarer, occurs most often in African Americans and in people of Mediterranean and Southeast Asian descent.³

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is a genetic condition that is present at birth. It is inherited when a child receives two sickle cell genes—one from each parent. A person with SCD can pass the disease or SCT on to their children. SCD can cause a constant shortage of red blood cells. Due to the mutation of the red blood cells, when they travel through small blood vessels, they get stuck and clog the blood flow.¹ This can cause pain and other serious problems.

It is important for individuals to know what SCT is, how it can affect them, and if and how SCD runs in their family. If left undetected and untreated, SCD can lead to severe health problems and

¹ *What you should know about sickle cell trait.* (n.d.). Retrieved March 3, 2022, from https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/sicklecell/documents/SCD%20factsheet_Sickle%20Cell%20Trait.pdf

² MediLexicon International. (n.d.). *Sickle cell anemia in African Americans: Symptoms, causes, and more.* Medical News Today. Retrieved March 3, 2022, from <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/african-american-anemia#causes>

³ Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. (2021, November 17). *Thalassemia.* Mayo Clinic. Retrieved March 3, 2022, from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/thalassemia/symptoms-causes/syc-20354995>

even death, early in childhood. Addressing the underlying causes contributing to the racial disparities in health outcomes and meeting the unique needs of individuals predisposed to genetic conditions will promote increased health equity and ensure progress on the state's population health goals.

For these reasons, we urge a **favorable** report on HB 1188.

For more information, please contact:
Brian Sims, Director, Quality & Health Improvement
Bsims@mhaonline.org