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**SUPPORT**  
**House Bill 1082**  
**Public Health - Consumer Health Information - Hub and Requirements**  
House Health and Government Operations Committee  
9 March 2022

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I strongly urge a favorable report for House Bill 1082. I do so based upon my experience as a founder and the former president of Consumer Health First<sup>1</sup>, and as a consumer advocate serving on numerous relevant health policy advisory bodies<sup>2</sup>.

Delegate Pena-Melnyk, in putting forward this legislation, has identified a critical, but under-resourced need - to increase health literacy levels in our state. The bill then identifies a rational and cost-effective tool to address this - a Consumer Health Information Hub that leverages the expertise at the University of Maryland's Horowitz Center for Health Literacy. This academically-based resource is unique to our state. Its designation as the hub for health-related information illuminates the critical role that health literacy plays in ensuring the success of Maryland's transformative approach to our health care delivery system. Its success rests upon the ability of individuals to make well-informed decisions. With the following I provide three perspectives for your consideration on why it is worth dedicating state resources to health literacy as laid out in HB1082.

**Personal:** Over the past year, as a cancer patient, I have had an up-close look at our health care system and that has only increased my understanding of the value of health literacy. For one, it became abundantly clear that my "success" in traversing the system had little to do with the fact that I live in the state ranked 5th in the nation for health care; or that I have the very best insurance coverage. Rather my path was made easier by my social and educational privilege, as well as the 15 years I have dedicated to health policy which brought me to an above average health literacy level. Yet even those did not shield me from multiple challenges that are endemic to our system. These included, but were not limited to: coordinating multiple medical specialists; addressing technological challenges and different systems to access health records; evaluating conflicting recommendations on medications and treatments; transportation issues; and more.

**Policy:** At every step in my journey I found myself asking - what if I lived in West Baltimore - who would help me navigate the system? What if I were in Somerset County, would I have internet access to get onto my EHR and, even if I did, would I know how to use that? As an immigrant, how might I find a doctor who understands my culture and speaks my language if I live in Washington County? These questions, and many more, point out the need for a total system

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<sup>1</sup> The mission for Consumer Health First was to advance equitable, affordable and comprehensive health care for all Marylanders.

<sup>2</sup> **Previous: Maryland Health Benefit Exchange** - Standing Advisory Committee and Workgroups; **Health Services Cost Review Commission** Advisory Councils; Consumer Engagement Task Force; Consumer-Standing Advisory Committee and Total Cost of Care Workgroup; **Office of the Attorney General** = Covid-19 Access to Justice Task Force; **Horowitz Center for Health Literacy** - Board.

**Current: Maryland Commission on Health Equity**, Policy Committee and HSCRC - Consumer Standing Advisory Committee

approach to health literacy to ensure that every Marylander has access to accurate, comprehensive and comprehensible information when and where they need it. That is what HB1082 will bring to Maryland and it will do so by leveraging the exceptional expertise and resources of the Horowitz Center to:

- establish and promote the use of plain language and health literacy criteria, certifications and best practices for state and local public agencies, health systems, non-profit and community-based and other organizations;
- identify health literacy barriers and help organizations address these;
- monitor progress and provide an annual report to the General Assembly.

To date the Center, with relatively limited resources, has undertaken important and innovative projects. For example, with funding from the National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine, the Center is creating a smartphone health information application<sup>3</sup> for African Americans and Spanish-speaking Hispanics. It is also supporting the Maryland Department of Health and Local Health Improvement Coalition's work on the state's Diabetes Prevention Plan.

In addition to the benefits that will accrue to individual Marylanders through passage of HB1082, it will also support the success of Maryland's public health and health systems infrastructure. These rely upon fully informed consumers who are empowered to make wise decisions. And of particular importance is the success of our unique *Maryland Model*, which is designed to "progressively transform care delivery across the health care system with the objective of improving health and quality of care"<sup>4</sup>. The state and health care system have invested heavily in this endeavor and now the Legislature can take another step to ensure its success while at the same time creating a model for other states to follow.

**Health Equity:** Lastly, I would ask that the Committee give due consideration to the inter-relationship between health literacy and health equity. This linkage has been underscored by, for example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services with the new Health Equity Guidelines for Inclusive Communication,<sup>5</sup> The National Institute for Children's Health Quality<sup>6</sup>, and the National Academy of Medicine in the paper "Health Literacy: A necessary Element for Achieving Health Equity."<sup>7</sup> HB1082 is vital if the state is to successfully address health equity.

For all of these reasons - raising individuals health literacy levels, supporting the success of Maryland's health care system transformation, and advancing our shared goal of health equity - I ask for a favorable report on HB1082 - Consumer Health Information - Hub and Requirements.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://sph.umd.edu/research-impact/research-centers/horowitz-center-health-literacy/projects-center-health-literacy/welcome-healthymemisalud-center-health-literacy>

<sup>4</sup> Health Services Cost Review Commission <https://hsrc.maryland.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Health Literacy and Health Equity: Connection the Dots - <https://health.gov/news/202110/health-literacy-and-health-equity-connecting-dots>

<sup>6</sup> The Intersection of Health Equity and Health Literacy - <https://www.nichq.org/insight/intersection-health-equity-and-health-literacy>

<sup>7</sup> <https://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/NecessaryElement.pdf>