

Testimony in Support of SB 682
Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Gender-Affirming Treatment
Trans Health Equity Act of 2022
House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 24, 2022

Nasira Lichtel (she/her)
43rd Maryland Legislative District

Chair Pendergrass and Members of the Committee,

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

SB 682 means a lot to me as a transgender woman currently on Medicaid. I've been reliant on Medicaid for my Gender Affirming Care for the past year since losing my mother's insurance after turning 26. During that time, I've struggled greatly with gender dysphoria related to issues for which the treatment is not covered through Medicaid currently, despite being deemed medically necessary for the treatment of gender dysphoria by medical organizations like WPATH and by my own physicians and therapists. These treatments are hand-waived away as 'cosmetic.' I can attest to the fact that they are not 'cosmetic' to me. When I first came out as transgender, I had a list of physical obstacles to me being accepted as my gender in public. It went:

1. Voice
2. Facial Hair
3. Facial Structure
4. Body Hair
5. Genitalia

When I go out into public every day, strangers don't see what's in my pants. They don't judge me for having a penis. They judge me for having a beard, for having hair all the way up my thighs, for not being able to sound like a cisgender woman, for having a masculine jawline. The only treatment that I need that is covered under Maryland Medicaid right now is vaginoplasty, aka bottom surgery, the thing that I have the least amount of dysphoria and social friction surrounding. What really astounds me is that a prerequisite for vaginoplasty is hair removal on the area being worked on, and hair removal is not covered by Medicaid. Something that is required to get a vaginoplasty, a service deemed medically necessary by Medicaid, is in itself deemed not medically necessary and 'cosmetic.'

Covering treatments like vocal therapy, laser and electrolysis hair removal, and facial feminization surgeries are small prices to pay compared to the economic damage caused by the suffering of gender diverse constituents, let alone the cost to the mental health of those suffering. There isn't a day that I wake up where I don't have to shave my beard and endure the constant reminder that my body does not align with my soul, and simply because I cannot afford the treatment. I lose sleep over trying to figure out how to finance things that should be covered—things that, again, are medically necessary to treat gender dysphoria. I've had to spend nearly a thousand dollars out of pocket with little to no income over the past year for facial hair removal and I'm probably going to have to spend another two thousand. That's a small price to pay in a budget of well over 10 billion dollars, but a crippling amount to try to find on my own as a full-time college student with no savings.

I implore you to support this bill. I cannot express enough in words how much getting coverage for the care my doctors and therapist agree I need would mean to me and so many other members of the gender diverse community in your constituency. Please, do the right thing.

Thank you for your consideration,

Nasira Lichtel
Pronouns: She/Her
1028 Woodson Rd. Apt. H
Baltimore, MD 21212