

State's Consumer Health Information Hub
HB 1082
SUPPORT
Written Testimony from Carol Cronin, M.S.W., M.S.G.
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As a gerontologist and patient advocate working both in Maryland and nationally, I strongly support HB 1082 that would designate a state consumer health information hub to address issues of health literacy.

Promoting the use of plain language is essential to help Marylanders understand the complexities of health care—particularly in our state where the “Maryland model” of regulation and oversight is different from healthcare delivered in other states.

A prerequisite for informed decision making by patients and families is the ability to understand information to support choices and protect health. We are fortunate to have a leading center at the Univ. of Maryland Horowitz Center for Health Literacy to provide assistance. Just this week, I was at a hospital patient/family meeting discussing the issue of implementing new state and federal billing practices – a difficult task given the complexity of the topic. My first thought and suggestion was: has the hospital team checked with the Horowitz Center for assistance?

The US healthcare system is complicated and expensive. Decisions that patients and families make about what healthcare they receive or don't receive and how and where they receive it all have significant consequences in terms of their health and their pocketbook. And outcomes are made worse by inequities due to race, ethnicity, education, age and other factors which is made clear by our COVID experience. Ensuring that patients and families understand their choices because information sponsors have communicated effectively is essential. Having a resource that is available to state and local public agencies, health systems, non-profit and community based organizations and others will help make this happen.

As a gerontologist and patient and family advocate who has worked at the federal level with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), in Maryland on the Consumer Standing Advisory Committee of the Health Services Cost Review Commission and several Maryland Health Care Commission committees and long been involved in the non-profit sector around informed health care decision making, I stand in strong support of HB 1082.

Thank you.

Carol Cronin
19 Mayo Ave.
Annapolis, MD 21403
443-994-4616 (cell)