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SB 634

February 23, 2022

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director, Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 634 – Health Insurance – Home Test Kits for Sexually Transmitted Diseases – Required Coverage

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Committee please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 634.

Sexually transmitted infection control is a public health emergency in Maryland. In Maryland's most recent report on sexually transmitted infections (STIs), the total number of cases of gonorrhea, chlamydia, and primary and secondary syphilis increased 51% from 2010 to 2019. While Maryland has made steady progress to reduce rates of new HIV diagnoses, every tool is needed in our kit to drive this rate to zero.

Access to testing is the catalyst to diagnose, treat, and prevent the onward spread of STI's. In high prevalence populations, over 50% of gonorrhea and chlamydia infections have no symptoms at all, underlining the need for screening tests. Undiagnosed and untreated STIs can lead to serious health consequences, including infertility, pregnancy complications, birth defects, and infant blindness. Furthermore, the presence of an STI can increase the risk for HIV acquisition and transmission.

SB 634 promises to enable increased access to HIV and STI testing by moving it out of the four walls of a clinic. At-home testing has been shown to be a safe, effective, and patient-centered model, and is promoted by the CDC. At-home testing overcomes the barriers of time, transportation, and stigma of seeking facility-based testing. Lastly, SB 634 will lessen a cost burden that currently makes at-home testing unfeasible for many. At-home HIV/STI tests currently can cost over \$100 out of pocket.

COVID-19 has spurred the rapid expansion of at-home testing, and demand has not declined even with the restoration of sexual health services.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB 634.

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