



**Testimony by
Michele Martz, President, UPMC Western Maryland
House Ways and Means Committee
February 16, 2022 – 1:00 p.m.**

**Re: HB 838 – Economic Development – Western Maryland Economic Future
Investment Board and Fund – Establishment**

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and committee members. My name is Michele Martz, and I am the President of UPMC Western Maryland hospital located in Cumberland, Maryland. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today about our support for House Bill 838. I also want to thank Delegates Buckel, Beitzel, McKay, Thiam, and Wivell for sponsoring this legislation, aimed at improving the economic conditions in western Maryland.

At one time our hospital, formerly the Western Maryland Health System, was one of several major employers in Allegany County. Today, we are the largest employer with nearly 2,100 employees, and, unfortunately, we are one of only two large employers (1,000 or more employees) remaining in the county. During my 32-year career, I have witnessed the negative impacts to our region resulting from the closures of Kelly-Springfield Tire Company, PPG Industries, Biederlack blanket company, Bayliner boat company and, most recently in 2019, the Verso paper mill. These closures have resulted in the loss of thousands of good-paying jobs in Allegany County.

The loss of these good-paying jobs has had a significant, negative impact on the financial health of families throughout our region. These job losses have also had a negative impact on the health and well-being of our community since oftentimes these unemployed individuals and their family members do not seek medical treatment because they no longer have health insurance. While having insurance is not a pre-requisite for receiving health care services, many individuals without insurance choose not to seek medical treatment, which often results in a long-term diminished quality of life for those

individuals and their families. In fiscal year 2021, our hospital provided \$14 million in charity care--which is free health care for patients who were unable to pay. We take great pride in caring for all of our patients regardless of their ability to pay; however, as I mentioned, there are many individuals who do not seek treatment because they do not have the financial means and/or health insurance, so they suffer in silence.

The average household income for Allegany County is approximately \$46,000 per year^(a), compared to Maryland's average household income of approximately \$85,000 per year^(b). The proposed legislation will help to create or retain jobs in our western region, allowing families to have the financial means to seek medical treatment and have a better overall quality of life. Moreover, we acknowledge that external factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have driven increases in substance use in our region which necessitates greater access to treatment and prevention resources ^(c).

In 2020, our hospital integrated with the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, a world-renowned health care provider and insurer. This integration has benefitted our hospital in numerous ways, including physician recruitment; however, it is still often difficult to attract and retain physicians and other health care professionals because of our location in a rural, economically depressed area. The proposed legislation provides funding for infrastructure and business development projects which will improve the economic climate of our region, making it more appealing for individuals—including physicians—to relocate to our community.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the House Ways and Means Committee give a **favorable report** to HB 838. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

(a) <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/alleganycountymaryland/INC110219>

(b) <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/INC110219>

(c) https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP68838.html