



Trans Health Equity Act of 2023
Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Gender-Affirming Treatment
Position: Favorable with Sponsor Amendments

Chair Peña-Melnyk and Members of the Health & Government Operations Committee,

My name is Diego Contreras, I am a Social Work Case Manager at Chase Brexton Health Care, and a member of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the country, with over 10,000 members in Maryland and Washington DC. Our union supports HB283 – the Trans Health Equity Act, and we urge the Committee to issue a **favorable** report, including **sponsor amendments**. This legislation will allow low-income transgender patients to access lifesaving, medically necessary gender affirming healthcare.

HB 283 is important because it recognizes something that should have been recognized a long time ago, that no matter your gender identity you are entitled to gender-affirming care. In my personal journey, I have benefited from my insurance covering gender-affirming care. Gender-affirming therapists helped me better understand my gender identity questions and feelings. Gender-affirming medical providers helped me understand my options. And gender-affirming health and mental health organizations helped me to connect with other people dealing with gender identity needs so that we could help each other through this journey. But I was only able to do this because I had private insurance. I would hope that someone who is in a situation where they cannot afford private insurance could also receive these services that help to reduce the anxiety and depression that one can experience from not addressing one's gender identity needs.

As a healthcare worker I was able to witness the benefits in people of having gender-affirming care be covered by Medicaid. When I worked at Whitman-Walker Health, a community health organization that provides gender-affirming care to the Washington DC metro area it was great to see how our patients who lived in DC and sought gender-affirming care were able to get that care through DC Medicaid because Washington, DC had already recognized the importance of this type of care. I also saw my coworkers' lives transformed by the type of gender-affirming care that they were able to receive, which helped them continue to provide great care for the community we served. This is why I think it is only right that you vote Yes on this life saving legislation to finally stop the denial of gender-affirming care of transgender Marylanders.

Additionally, I support Delegate Anne Kaiser's amendment to require consent from healthcare providers to have our names listed on a public directory of providers who specialize in gender-affirming healthcare, rather than mandating all providers be listed as the current bill draft requires. I urge the Committee to adopt this amendment as it is important for the safety of healthcare workers.

In Unity,
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