

February 23, 2023

Rabbi Marc Israel
Rockville, MD 20853

TESTIMONY ON HB#0588 - FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
Health Insurance - Qualified Resident Enrollment Program (Access to Care Act)

TO: Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Kelly and Members of the Health And Government Operations Committee

FROM: Rabbi Marc D. Israel

My name is Marc Israel. I am a resident of District 19 and I am submitting this testimony in support, with amendments, of HB# 0588, the Access to Care Act.

I am a first-generation American on my father's side and know the struggles my dad and his parents went through when they moved to this country. I am also the rabbi at Tikvat Israel synagogue in Rockville; as a small congregation, we aren't able to provide a full health care plan. Last year, my wife switched jobs and we needed to get health insurance through the Maryland Exchange. I was impressed with the quality and quantity of options available, and we found a plan that meets our needs.

We live in Rockville, an area with many recent immigrants. Many don't have access to the Maryland Health Exchange because of their immigration status. Passing the Access to Care Act will give these families the same opportunity for health care that I have for my family.

As a rabbi, I often teach my community that the rabbis of the Talmud required communal leaders to provide healthcare and other essential services for non-citizens at the same level as citizens. The text explains that we do this for the sake of *shalom* (peace), which comes from the same Hebrew root as *shalem* (wholeness). Passing the Access to Care Act is an important opportunity to make our communities whole, allowing every Maryland resident equal access to health care.

The current bill, HB#0588 (and its Senate companion SB#0365), would open the Maryland Health Exchange to the 275,000 undocumented immigrants in Maryland, reducing emergency room visits and mortality rates, as well as increase rates of early detection and improve the long-term management of chronic diseases and serious illnesses.

Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic, the state of Maryland has been a leader in our nation by enacting science-based, sensible health care measures to prevent the spread of the virus. At a time when many states are mistreating immigrants through cruel and bigoted means, Maryland once again has an opportunity to be a leader and to live out our value of welcoming the stranger by ensuring that everyone has access to health care. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable with amendments report on HB#0588.**