
**Testimony in FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT of HB558
Health Insurance - Qualified Resident Enrollment Program (Access to Care Act)
House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 23, 2023**

Dear Honorable Chair Peña-Melnyk, and Members of the Committee,
La Clínica del Pueblo is pleased to support HB 588 with the amendments.

My name is Claudia Guevara, I was born in Washington DC and my parents are from El Salvador. I have been a Maryland resident for 16 years in Prince George's County. I work as a Health Center Manager at La Clínica del Pueblo in Hyattsville. I have over 9 years of experience working with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). In my job, I oversee the patient services team that helps patients who are uninsured and underinsured with chronic diseases.

On behalf of La Clínica del Pueblo we would like to thank Delegate Cullison for her sponsorship of this critical legislation.

As you know, La Clínica del Pueblo is an FQHC that has offered health and community services since 1983 in the Washington Metropolitan area. Our Prince George's County clinic located in Hyattsville opened in 2016. We also run a mental health program at Northwestern High School called Mi Refugio, to support young newcomers. Our mission is to build a healthy Latino community through culturally appropriate health services, especially for those most in need.

Today we would like to speak about the lack of health care coverage for Latino immigrants in Maryland. Having a large part of the community outside of the healthcare system is risky. Uninsured people avoid seeking medical care unless they face an emergency and delay care until their symptoms become intolerable. Approximately 275,000 Maryland residents remain ineligible for public or privately owned health insurance due to their immigration status.

We recently published a White Paper about COVID vaccine barriers for Latino immigrants. In our survey, we found that 77% of participants who lived in Maryland were uninsured. Participants stated that lack of trust was due to the spread of misinformation about the vaccine and efficacy. However, one proven strategy to combat medical distrust is regular access to primary care, which our community is routinely excluded from due to immigration status, income, or type of employment.

Uninsured patients are also having to deal with other public health crisis which is gun violence. In the last couple of weeks, we received two uninsured patients who came with severe injuries as result of firearms. Take, for example, a 33-year-old male immigrant who was a victim of an armed robbery and was shot multiple times. This gentleman is uninsured and at the time of dismissal the hospital reached out to La Clínica to see if we were able to see him and establish follow up care with us. Although the capacity of La Clínica is very limited we were able to coordinate care and get him seen with our primary care provider and warm handoff with our mental health team due to trauma and learning how to live wheelchair bound.

Today I respectfully urge you to support the *Access to Care Act*.

Immigrants support the county's economy in paying their taxes and working across sectors. We were and continue to be essential in Maryland's economy. Consistent access to healthcare services is one way we can recognize our contributions and decrease health disparities.

For the purposes of equity, La Clínica del Pueblo supports an amendment that ensures newly qualified individuals will receive the same subsidy rate as all other individuals covered under the Affordable Care Act.

Thank you for your consideration and your leadership!

Sincerely,
Claudia Guevara