



Testimony on **HB 329**
Public Health - Commission on Universal Health Care
Position: **FAVORABLE**

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

My name is Ricarra Jones. I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, the largest healthcare workers union in the nation. Our union represents over 10,000 members in Maryland at over 100 facilities across our state. We urge a favorable report on HB329 to establish a commission on universal healthcare because healthcare is a human right, and this bill is a necessary first step to ensuring every Marylander has health insurance coverage.

As a union we have been successful in bargaining for health insurance for our members. We support the passage of this bill because the majority of workers in our state are non-union and they deserve access to healthcare; and because when we have a single-payer healthcare system, we won't need to bargain on healthcare coverage which will allow us to focus on bargaining on other important issues that will protect and uplift our members.

We are in the midst of a dire short staffing crisis in healthcare, and Maryland has the longest hospital wait times in the United States. One of the contributing factors to these crises is low and middle income patients who can't afford the high cost of healthcare do not seek primary and preventative care. That means the only care they are getting is when their health deteriorates so much that they are forced to seek treatment in the Emergency Department. Then they end up with even higher medical bills and worsening health outcomes, and the Emergency Department has a constant overflow of patients with not enough workers to care for them on time.

Additionally, having a single-payer healthcare system will reduce the administrative burden on overworked healthcare workers as they won't have to go back-and-forth with numerous health insurance companies to get their patient's care covered. This will allow healthcare providers to spend more time with their patients. For the sake of Maryland's patients and the workers who care for them, please issue a favorable report on this bill.

In Unity,
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