

Testimony in Support of HB 283
Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Gender-Affirming Treatment
Trans Health Equity Act of 2023
Health and Government Operations Committee
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Harry Barbee, PhD
Baltimore, Maryland

Chair Peña-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the chance to testify in support of House Bill 283.

Supporting HB 283 is critically important to improving transgender health outcomes and reducing the health disparities endured by the transgender population. I am an Assistant Professor in the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. I am a researcher of transgender health and aging, more specifically, and I have spent the last ten years studying population health outcomes among transgender people. Among the data sources available to researchers, growing evidence indicates that transgender populations have less favorable health outcomes compared to cisgender people. Poor *mental health* outcomes among transgender people are especially alarming to health researchers like myself. As an illustration, in *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, one of the most widely cited data sources of nearly 28,000 transgender people in the United States, researchers found that 40% of transgender respondents had attempted suicide in their lifetime, a figure nine-times higher than the attempted suicide rate of the overall U.S. population.

Transgender health disparities are largely driven by ongoing exposure to daily stressors like discrimination, stigmatization, and violence that deny transgender people access to beneficial resources and chronically activate their bodies' stress response system, leading to poor health overtime. Some of the most common stressors that transgender people report include lack of access to gender-affirming health care and experiences of discrimination within health care environments. For example, among the 662 transgender respondents in the *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey* residing in the State of Maryland, 25% said they "experienced a problem in the past year with their insurance, such as being denied coverage for care related to gender transition or being denied coverage for routine care because they were transgender." 29% of transgender respondents residing in Maryland who reported seeing a health care provider in the last year said that they had experienced a negative interaction with their provider, like being refused treatment. Finally, 23% of transgender respondents residing in the State of Maryland said that they "did not see a doctor when they needed to because of fear of being mistreated as a transgender person." Taken together, these statistics reveal a troubling pattern of discriminatory behavior toward transgender people that has serious health implications. Moreover, they also underscore the completely preventable nature of these problems facing transgender people.

Public policy interventions, like House Bill 283, that expand transgender people's access to gender-affirming health care have outstanding potential to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities that transgender people experience. Gender-affirming care is supported by major medical organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Psychiatric Association, to name a few. My own scholarship supports expanding access to affirming health care, and this work has been published in major peer-reviewed medical journals including the *American*

Journal of Preventive Medicine and the *Journal of the American Medical Association, Pediatrics*. Some benefits of expanding access to affirming health care could include reducing transgender people's experience of discrimination in health care environments; generating stronger trust between transgender patients and their health care providers; encouraging greater uptake of preventive health behaviors by transgender people; and reducing mental health conditions, such as psychological distress, that develop when transgender people lack access to gender-affirming services.

The United States is currently amid a national crisis wherein states across the country are enacting policies that specifically target and harm transgender people, an already vulnerable population. By supporting HB 283, Maryland legislators have an opportunity to both protect transgender people living in our state and also signal to the country that our state is different -- that our state is a place where people will not be discriminated against or denied necessary health care because of their gender identity.

I strongly support HB 283 and I urge Maryland legislators to support it, also.

Thank you for your consideration,

Harry Barbee, PhD
624 N. Broadway
Hampton House 755
Baltimore, MD 21205