



TESTIMONY TO THE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

HB0814: Maryland Health Benefit Exchange- State-Based Young Adult Health Insurance Subsidies Pilot Program- Sunset Repeal

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

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The League of Women Voters Maryland supports **House Bill 814**, which would remove the sunset and allow the Young Adult Health Insurance Subsidies Program to continue.

The League believes that health care is a human right, and that every Maryland resident should have access to affordable, equitable, quality health care. But without health insurance coverage, patients can be unable to access the services they need, relying instead on overburdened hospital Emergency Departments for non-emergency care. This can lead to potentially unmanageable medical debt for the patient, increased uncompensated care costs for hospitals, and, ultimately, increased costs of medical care for everyone. **Expanding access to affordable health insurance is crucial, so that all Marylanders will be able to get the care they need.**

After the Covid-19 public health emergency ends this spring, the Department of Health and Human Services estimates¹ that 15 million people could lose Medicaid coverage, with young adults being disproportionately affected. **Young adults age 18-34 already have the highest uninsured rate in the U.S.,² with the cost of coverage identified as the biggest barrier.** Offering young adults financial assistance to help pay health insurance premiums is a proven, cost-effective method of ensuring their access to health care.

In 2021, the Maryland legislature created a two-year pilot program to provide premium subsidies to eligible low-income young adults, enabling them to purchase health insurance on the Health Benefit Exchange.

¹ <https://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/news/15-million-people-may-lose-medicaid-coverage-after-covid-19-phe-ends-says-hhs>

² <https://www.healthsystemtracker.org/indicator/access-affordability/percent-uninsured/#Share%20people%20who%20were%20uninsured%20or%20underinsured,%20under%20age%2065,%202021>

The program has been very successful. **About 45,000 young Marylanders have used the subsidies to enroll in insurance coverage, with an average premium reduction of \$35, or 34%.³** The pilot program also increased health equity and reduced racial and ethnic health disparities within this age group, as young adult subsidy recipients were more likely to be Latino or Black than those ineligible for the subsidy.

Helping more young adults enroll in and keep health care coverage benefits all Marylanders, as having more young, healthy people in the market helps stabilize premiums for everyone. Continuing this program is a cost-effective way to help ensure that our healthcare system is equitable and works for all. **For that reason, the League and its 1,500+ members urge the committee to give a favorable report to House Bill 814.**

³ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/meeting_material/2023/fin%20-%20133186084689248219%20-%20Briefing%20Materials%2001-19-23.pdf