

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT, WITH AMENDMENTS, OF HOUSE BILL 588

Qualified Resident Enrolment Program (Access to Care Act)

Dear Sponsoring Delegates and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on House Bill 588, Access to Care Act. I am a member of the Executive Committee of the Howard County Coalition for Immigrant Justice; I am an immigrant and a veteran (mos. medic). I support passage of HB 588, with amendments.

HB 588 assures that undocumented immigrant residents that would qualify for subsidies under the Maryland Health Exchange, if not for their immigration status, can participate in this critical program. We are talking about an estimated 125,000 souls that have no access to regular medical care because their status as undocumented. But that is a worthy population, employed, paying taxes and raising families. Lack of access to care hurts families. Moreover, people lacking systematic care go to emergency room, when in medical dire strait. That is a fiscally and medically inefficient manner to attend to the medical needs of a population. For at least some of these patients, it ends up costing our state more than subsidizing their health insurance premiums. Denying regular medical care is an irresponsible way to create a worthy society and a non-cost-effective manner to run our state.

I am concerned that the impact of the passage of HB588 might-be-reduced if subsidized insurance for immigrants would be different than insurance provided to other equally qualified residents. That would lead to imparities and weaken the positive effects of universal health care.

I support HB 588, as long as it makes the program available to immigrants on an equal footing with what is available to other state residents. Please pass this bill, with any necessary amendments to make benefits to residents undistinguishable between demographics.

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