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Testimony of Valeria Hernandez Munoz
In Support of HB 283: Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Gender-Affirming Treatment
Trans Health Equity Act of 2023
Health and Government Operations Committee
February 14, 2023

Chair Peña-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

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

I am a medical student, an aspiring pediatrician, and a resident of Baltimore city. I have worked in free clinics as well as outpatient clinics with people of all ages. Adolescents are my favorite population to work with since they are bright individuals with many interesting pursuits, and are in the process of becoming self-sufficient adults. It is a gift to be able to help them at this point of their lives. However, increasingly, I have noticed an uptick in depression and anxiety disorders in this age group.

I believe that HB 283 is important because transgender youth have an increased risk of developing depression (50.6% vs. 20.6%), anxiety (26.7% vs. 10%), suicide attempts (17.2% vs. 6.1%) and self-harm (16.7% vs. 4.4%) compared to their cisgender peers [1]. It is particularly tragic to see these young people and their families suffer from discrimination by people who used to be their friends before knowing of their gender identity. One of my patients is currently contemplating dropping out college given the lack of support and community that she's experiencing while she awaits funds for gender-affirming care. This has driven her to self-harm and suicidal ideation, to her mother's upmost distress. And yet, gender-affirming care, including puberty blockers and gender-affirming hormones, has been associated with 60% lower odds of moderate or severe depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality over a 12-month follow-up [2].

Passing HB 283 would make these life-saving health services accessible to these families. With only 0.005% of our Medicaid budget, such pediatric patients would be given the services they need to grow up as all children should, being excited about their favorite classes, their friends, and their flourishing identity.

Please do what you can to support the LGBTQ community and support HB 283.

Yours truly,

Valeria Hernandez Munoz, MPH

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[1] Reisner, S. L., Veters, R., Leclerc, M., Zaslow, S., Wolfrum, S., Shumer, D., & Mimiaga, M. J. (2015). Mental health of transgender youth in care at an adolescent urban community health center: a matched retrospective cohort study. *The Journal of adolescent health : official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 56(3), 274–279. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.10.264>

[2] Tordoff et al. Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender and Nonbinary Youths Receiving Gender-Affirming Care. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2022;5(2):e220978. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.0978