

Testimony 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

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Chair Peña-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the chance to testify in support of House Bill 283. My name is Ava Niknahad. I am a resident of District 45. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 283, the Trans Health Equity Act, which would expand Maryland Medicaid to cover lifesaving gender-affirming care.

The Trans Health Equity Act (THEA) addresses a critical gap in the healthcare of transgender Marylanders by ensuring Medicaid coverage for gender-affirming healthcare. Currently, Maryland Medicaid excludes many gender-affirming procedures. There is consensus in the medical community that these procedures are medically necessary and reduce suicide, abuse, discrimination, and harassment. THEA is a low-cost solution that improves the quality of life of trans Marylanders, brings Maryland Medicaid into compliance with federal law, and meets current medical standards.

I believe that HB 283 is important because as a future provider, I hope to ensure holistic comprehensive care for all of my patients that is just and equitable. Transgender individuals are at a higher risk of depression and anxiety, and by having their therapy covered under Medicaid, we can ensure equitable access to procedures and therapies than can increase their quality of life. Not only the procedures and therapies are meaningful and essential for our transgenders' population's well-being, but they also can help Maryland save cost from long-term physical and mental health complications, such as a 84% reduction in suicide attempts. Transgender individuals are like any other patient, and we need to have their services covered by Medicaid to treat everyone justly. On the broader level, the federal government has named gender-affirming care as an "essential health benefit" protected under Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act. This has been upheld in federal district courts and is backed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Considering all these benefits and ruling of federal district courts and a simple moral reasoning, you can realize that passing THEA is not a privilege for transgender individuals, but a must and a necessity.

As a future provider, I will not be doing my part in medicine if I do not support all my patients for their best care possible. Passing THEA is crucial for care of transgender individuals, and is a necessity that should have been addressed and done already. I really hope that you can do whatever you can to support HB 283.

Thank you for your consideration,

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