

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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Chair Peña-Melnik and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the chance to testify in support of House Bill 283. My name is Lorenzo Solon. I am a resident of District 46. 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 I have extensive experience working and volunteering as an adolescent/young adult mental health counselor. In this role, I have had numerous encounters where these students and young adults explained how federal, state, and local healthcare bills have impacted their mental and emotional well-being. Whether they are looking for access to mental health care, substance use disorder treatment, sexually transmitted infection prevention, or other vital prevention resources, it is often a painstaking and tedious process to work within the various levels of policy that impact the accessibility of these resources. In a population where the rates of mental health disorders and suicide completion are rapidly increasing, I have seen how this struggle to wrangle with complicated and limiting healthcare policies further perpetuates the symptoms of mental and emotional distress.

As a current medical student, I am learning about the complex interplay between built environment, education, social structures, and political structures that directly impact physical and mental health. House Bill 283 has the opportunity to serve as a structural centerpiece for expanding quality healthcare to the transgender community in the state of Maryland. Numerous studies over many years have found that transgender individuals have dramatically higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts compared to cisgender individuals. With gender-affirming care finally gaining the attention and support in various states across the nation, access to services such as puberty blockers, gender-affirming hormones, and gender-affirming surgery has improved and researchers have been able to measure their impact on the mental health of transgender individuals. The results are exceedingly favorable, as multiple papers have shown decreases in the odds of depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance use disorders, along with increases in quality of life amongst transgender youth. While further research needs to be done on the effects of gender-affirming care, I firmly believe that HB 283 will improve the mental and physical health of transgender individuals in Maryland.

Ultimately, I am not alone in my beliefs because the federal government has declared gender-affirming care as an essential health benefit under Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act and more than 10 states have followed suit. I personally have seen how influential healthcare policies can be on transgender individuals who are struggling with their mental health, and look forward to seeing how our political institutions can serve to improve the lives of this community and work towards constructing a more equitable society.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lorenzo Solon
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