

House Hearing 2/23/2023

TESTIMONY ON HB0588 - POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
Health Insurance - Qualified Enrollment Program (Access to Care)

TO: Chair Pena-Melnyk, Health and Government Operations

FROM: Richard L. Gelula, MSW, Olney, MD, citizen, voter & volunteer

OPENING: My name is Richard Gelula. I am a resident of Maryland District 14. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0588 (Health Insurance - Qualified Enrollment Program - Access to Care). I support amendments endorsed by CASA and JUFJ.

My wife and I are 32 year residents of Maryland. We are both social workers. In my career of 45 years, I worked primarily on issues related to displaced and homeless persons (including refugees and migrants), poverty, patient advocacy, and health and safety issues.

In the 21st Century, healthcare must be recognized in policy and law as a universal human right regardless of citizenship status. This is particularly important today when medical science provides the means to prevent disease, diagnose it early, and successfully treat many conditions, giving people the gift of health – and ensuring our society and economy have a workforce that can make productive contributions throughout their lives. Timely healthcare for all also benefits public health and saves on healthcare expenditures.

We are particularly concerned about healthcare access for immigrants in our Maryland communities. When repairs and remodeling were done on our home, we found that all of the workers were immigrants from Central American countries. These workers were skilled and hard working. We learned that most did not have health insurance despite the fact that they were doing strenuous work with possibly toxic exposure that could damage their health over time. They were all men; many had families they were supporting in Maryland and/or their homelands.

Maryland is blessed with high quality healthcare and the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange makes insurance available at an affordable cost to nearly 200,000 Maryland residents. Maryland policy and law should ensure that immigrant and/or undocumented workers and families are granted full access to the Exchange and healthcare services. This is a matter of dignity, justice and the universal right of all people to needed healthcare, particularly those in our midst contributing so much to our society and economy. I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable with amendments report on HB0588.