



<https://bit.ly/CHW-MD>
TELEPHONE: (410) 625-9409
FAX: (410) 625-9423

HB 568
Community Health Worker Appreciation Day
Hearing of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
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1:00 PM

FAVORABLE

The **Community Health Workers Empowerment Coalition of Maryland (CHWEC-MD)** is a coalition of CHWs and those who train, educate, support, and employ them across the state of Maryland. Our collective goals are to 1) reduce disparities in healthcare access and outcomes for Marylanders by expanding access to CHWs, 2) ensure that the voices of Maryland's CHWs are represented in the creation of laws and policies that impact the profession, and 3) advocate with CHWs for solutions that address systemic inequities that they experience in the field, including a lack of reimbursement for their services. We stand in **strong support of HB 568**, which would require the Governor to proclaim May 8th as Community Health Worker Appreciation Day in Maryland. It would also urge educational and cultural organizations to promote the work of CHWs with informative programs and activities.

A CHW is a frontline public health worker that is a trusted member of their community with a deep understanding of the barriers to attaining good health that their community faces. They often share similar lived experiences with the communities they serve, which puts them in the position to be a connection between healthcare providers and the community. CHWs are part of a comprehensive approach to patient health. They not only provide education and information to patients on health, they also help address social determinants of health like access to food, transportation, and housing by helping patients navigate social services. CHWs in Maryland are embedded in a variety of settings across our healthcare system such as substance use disorder and mental health clinics, hospitals, and maternal health providers. In fact, Maryland is the proud home of the 4th largest CHW workforce in the country with nearly 2,500 employed CHWs.¹

CHWs advance health equity in Maryland, but lack recognition for their contributions to improving health outcomes. Though Maryland has a large CHW workforce, our CHWs face significant barriers to remaining in their field. Maryland's Medicaid program does not currently

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wages – 21-1094 Community Health Workers (May 2022), <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211094.htm>.

reimburse CHW services. Many CHW positions are supported only by short term funding, which is a barrier to creating sustainable careers in the profession. Grants available to support CHWs often restrict them to working with patients with specific diseases or in a specific setting instead of engaging in the holistic, community-focused work that make CHWs such an effective health intervention. Once the grant funding dries up, CHWs may have no choice but to leave the field to pursue other financially sustainable career paths.

If passed, HB568 would contribute to directly addressing these barriers by educating potential employers of CHWs on the value of their work and how to better integrate them into care teams. It would also help raise awareness among Marylanders of the importance of CHW's in advancing health equity. Finally, HB568 would help our state prioritize identifying financially sustainable pathways for supporting CHW services and keeping practicing CHW's in the field.

Thank you for your consideration, and we respectfully urge this Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB568**. Should you have any questions about this testimony, please contact David Reische at reisched@publicjustice.org, or call 410-625-9409 ext. 277.