

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 705
Health Insurance - Qualified Resident Enrollment Program (Access to Care
Act)
Senate Finance Committee

February 21, 2024

Dear Honorable Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tara McCaffrey. I was born and raised in New York, but I moved to Maryland in 2022 to attend the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and have remained a resident of Baltimore since. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 705, the Access to Care Act.

Over the past year, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of comprehensive healthcare access. As a first-year medical student at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, I had the opportunity to work with an asylum seeker only a few months after their arrival in the US. They arrived alone, without any known relatives here or any remaining family members in their home country. Additionally, they faced an immense amount of health issues resulting from the violence and torture unjustly inflicted upon them in their previous residence. These health issues made tasks such as sleeping, eating, and commuting almost impossible. Coming here alone as an asylum seeker, they had to start from square one in terms of integrating into their new local society, and they had no physical ability to do so.

Through the incredible staff at the Esperanza Center and resources supported by the Johns Hopkins Healthcare System, we were able to connect the patient to basic diagnostic tests. We identified health problems that were the root of the patient's physical distress and were ultimately able to resolve many of these problems through treatments supported by The Access Partnership Program (TAP), a Hopkins program that provides free healthcare access to uninsured patients living near Johns Hopkins Hospital and Bayview Medical Center. Through ongoing medical care and support services, this individual has made remarkable strides in their journey toward recovery and resilience. Their physical health has improved significantly, and they have experienced profound enhancements in their mental well-being. Access to consistent healthcare has not only alleviated their immediate health concerns but has also empowered them to pursue their aspirations and contribute positively to their community.

The 2024 Access to Care Act represents a pivotal opportunity to extend similar transformative experiences to all undocumented residents in Maryland. By opening access to the Maryland Health Exchange and the Young Adult Subsidies Program, this legislation will provide vital pathways for individuals like the asylum seeker I worked with to obtain the healthcare coverage they desperately need. It is a crucial step towards fostering a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system that recognizes the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of their immigration status.

I deeply urge support of the SB 705 Access to Care Act, recognizing that it not only promotes public health but also upholds basic values of compassion, justice, and humanity. My signature

and testimony stand as a testament to the urgent need for action in ensuring that all residents of Maryland have the opportunity to access the care they deserve.

The views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect the policies or positions of (Johns Hopkins University/Johns Hopkins Health System/University of Maryland/University of Maryland Health System).

Thank you for your leadership and consideration!
Sincerely,

Tara McCaffrey