

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

My name is Howard Li. I am a medical student at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and have lived in Baltimore, Maryland over the last two years. The views expressed today are my own.

During my time at Hopkins, I have worked with the HEAL Refugee Health and Asylum Collaborative to help provide forensic evaluation services to asylum seekers. This has shown me the myriad of mental and physical health challenges that asylum seekers face. Perhaps most pertinently, I have also helped two asylum seekers with all of their health navigation through the Asylee Women Enterprise. It is from this specific first-hand experience that I come to emphasize how important passing the Access to Care Act is for necessary, equitable healthcare in the state of Maryland. There is one story I hope to highlight.

On a Sunday morning, I received an urgent phone call from one of my clients, a middle-aged mother and an asylum seeker. It was clear she was experiencing an acute medical emergency, with severe chest pain. However, instead of calling 9/11 like most of us would, she decided to call me to ask how she would pay for her ambulance and emergency room visit. While her very life was at risk, her concerns were financial, regarding her uninsured status. It is clear that this well-founded fear of financial burden delayed necessary healthcare, and threatened her life. She is still struggling to pay that bill half a year later.

I hope my story illustrates the importance of providing undocumented residents with the opportunity for health insurance coverage. It is my heartache associated with this story that brings me here to testify in support of Senate Bill 705: Access to Care Act. As a future physician, I believe it is imperative to safeguard the health of our most vulnerable populations and advance equity in Maryland's healthcare system, regardless of patients' documentation status.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Howard Li