

Hearing Date Wednesday February 21, 2024

Susan Tafler, Odenton, Maryland 21113

TESTIMONY ON SB0705 - POSITION: FAVORABLE--- Access to Care Act (Health Insurance—Qualified Resident Enrollment Program)

TO: Chair Pamela Beidle, Vice Chair Katherine Klausmeier, and members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Susan Tafler

My name is Susan Tafler. I am a resident of Odenton (District 21). I am submitting this testimony in support of SB0705, Access to Care Act (Health Insurance—Qualified Resident Enrollment Program), sponsored by Senators Hayes and Lam.

As a Jew guided by our sacred texts, I am mindful that we have been commanded: “When strangers reside with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The sojourners who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (*Leviticus 19: 33-34*). As Jews and as human beings, we are obligated to make sure that those of us who were not born in our community are as safe and as healthy as those of us who were.

I am also the granddaughter of four immigrants from Eastern Europe who came to America for freedom from forced conscription and freedom from arrest for unionizing activities as well as better economic opportunities and safety from antisemitic pogroms. Unfortunately, my paternal grandmother died giving birth to what would have been her fifth son, leaving a devastated husband as well as her four American-born sons (including my eight-year-old father) to be raised in the foster care system. I was named for this grandmother.

Perhaps with modern medicine, my grandmother could have survived to raise her sons, although they were a very poor family and modern medical care has become very expensive. And today people in Maryland face obstacles to accessing health care because of their immigration status. I can't help but think about the children who might survive the death of an immigrant mother who dies due to the lack of proper medical attention, and I remember the story of my grandmother. That is why I care passionately about the Access to Care Act. Although the Affordable Care Act has granted millions of people in the United States access to affordable health care, it is estimated that more than 275,000 undocumented immigrants in Maryland are ineligible for insurance through the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange. Passing the Access to Care Act would require the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange to establish and operate the Qualified Resident Enrollment Program, which would make quality health insurance available to all Marylanders who meet the regular ACA eligibility criteria, regardless of immigration status. Greater access to health care would reduce emergency room visits and mortality rates, as well as increase rates of early detection and improve the long-term management of chronic diseases and chronic illnesses. Everyone in Maryland deserves to live a healthy life, regardless of where they were born and what documents they have.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0705.