

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB0705
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,

I am Anita Lampel, Bethesda, MD, District 16. I am urging a favorable vote on SB0705-Health Insurance - Qualified Resident Enrollment Program (Access to Care Act)

SB0705 addresses critical health disparities faced by the immigrant community in Maryland by expanding the Affordable Care Act to all Marylanders, regardless of their immigration status, by a simple act of requiring MHBE to request a 1332 waiver to allow Maryland residents, regardless of immigration status, to purchase insurance on the Exchange. SB 0705 represents an important milestone in our journey toward creating a resilient healthcare system.

This bill is about making sure that hard-working, taxpaying Marylanders can have access to the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and the opportunity to pay for health care insurance. The Affordable Care Act has allowed more than 28 million people across the country to gain access to affordable health care. In Maryland, since the establishment of the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE) in 2011, which allows individuals and small businesses to purchase affordable health coverage, **our uninsured rate has almost halved from 12% to 6%.¹**

But a staggering 30% of the uninsured are denied healthcare coverage solely because of their immigration status. This systematic and structural inability to access routine, comprehensive, affordable care has led uninsured Marylanders to seek out the most expensive type of care there is: emergency departments. When individuals have access to primary care, it results in higher rates of early detection and better long-term management of chronic diseases and serious illnesses, a decrease in mortality rates, and an increase in overall healthier and wealthier communities.

Multiple states across the country have established comprehensive programs to extend coverage to immigrants regardless of their immigration status. Maryland has the fifth-highest percentage of the immigrant population - leaving one of the most significant percentages of residents left without care. SB0705 is a crucial step in addressing access to care for all Marylanders.

I urge a favorable vote on SB0705 for everyone's health and wellbeing.

¹ <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/HealthInsurance/state/MD>

