



February 22, 2024

The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chair, Health, and Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 965 - Maryland Department of Health - Breast Cancer Program - Eligibility and Public Awareness Campaign

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk:

The Maryland State Council on Cancer Control (the Council) is submitting this letter of information for House Bill 965 (HB 965), titled: "Maryland Department of Health - Breast Cancer Program - Eligibility and Public Awareness Campaign." HB 965 would require the Maryland Department of Health (Department) to change the eligibility requirements for certain screening mammograms and clinical breast examinations provided by the Breast Cancer Program (Program) to include women under the age of 45 years who are considered high risk for breast cancer and the Department would develop and implement a public awareness campaign for the Program.

Overall, the Council is in support of HB 965 but does have concerns related to proposed eligibility changes in income and health insurance status. Early detection of breast cancer is crucial for successful treatment and improved survival rates. Expanding the Breast Cancer Program to include high-risk women under 45 does offer benefits, both for individuals and the healthcare system. Benefits would include:

Enhanced Personal Protection: Women with risk factors like family history, genetic mutations, or dense breast tissue face a higher chance of developing breast cancer. Early access to screening through mammograms and clinical breast examinations allows for timely detection and intervention, potentially saving lives and offering treatment options with better outcomes. This empowerment over their health improves women's peace of mind and well-being.

Reduced Healthcare Costs: Catching breast cancer early saves resources in the long run. Advanced cancers often require more intensive and expensive treatments. By identifying cancer at an early stage, the program can potentially reduce hospitalization costs, chemotherapy needs, and long-term treatment burdens. This benefits both women and the healthcare system as a whole.

Building Awareness and Equity: A targeted public awareness campaign is crucial to ensure program success. By informing high-risk women about the expanded eligibility and emphasizing the importance of early detection, the campaign can empower them to seek screening and advocate for their health. This awareness also promotes equity in healthcare access, ensuring high-risk women, regardless of age, have the opportunity for early detection and improved outcomes.



The Council applauds the intention behind SB 965 to expand access to vital breast cancer programs. However, we have concerns about the proposed expansion to change income and insurance status requirements, particularly when funding is finite. While early detection and access to care are crucial for all women, including those at high risk, we urge careful consideration of how best to allocate resources within this program.

Including women with existing insurance could divert resources from the program's intended beneficiaries: low-income and uninsured or underinsured women who face significant barriers to accessing quality breast cancer care. These women are often diagnosed later, experience poorer outcomes, and face greater financial hardship due to treatment costs. To maximize the program's impact and ensure equitable access, we propose prioritizing low-income and uninsured or underinsured women. We believe this approach would better align with the program's goals and ensure that limited resources reach those who need them most.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin J. Cullen, MD". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Kevin Cullen, MD
Chair,
Maryland State Council on Cancer Control