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**HB 728**  
**Health Insurance – Qualified Resident Enrolment Program (Access to Care Act)**  
**Hearing of the House Health & Government Operations Committee**  
**February 8, 2024**  
**1:00 PM**

**SUPPORT**

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. **PJC strongly supports HB 728** which would require the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE) to request a 1332 waiver to allow Maryland residents, regardless of immigration status, to purchase insurance on the MHBE.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and worsened existing health disparities and inequities in healthcare access. One of the most glaring disparities is the lack of health insurance coverage available to immigrants depending on their immigration status. The current state and federal laws that prevent certain categories of immigrants from participating in the marketplace has the effect of gatekeeping healthcare from over 275,000 undocumented immigrants residing in Maryland and places them at great risk of chronic illness and other health complications. HB 728 attempts to correct this inequity by expanding access to the MHBE to all Marylanders who would otherwise be eligible but for immigration status. This can be done without cost to the state of Maryland. Allowing immigrant communities to access the same health insurance market as citizens will help remove obstacles to covering needed care.

**HB 728, if passed, would carve a pathway towards comprehensive and affordable health care and good health outcomes for immigrant communities in Maryland.** For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB 728**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Woolard at 410-625-9409 x 224 or [woolarda@publicjustice.org](mailto:woolarda@publicjustice.org).