

Date: February 13, 2024

To: Chair Pena-Melnyk and Vice Chair Cullison of the Health and Government Operations Committee

Reference: House Bill 865, Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance- Coverage for Orthoses and Protheses

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair, Pena-Melnyk and the Committee Members:

My name is Shannon Dillingham, and I am asking for your vote in favor of House Bill 865 regarding insurance coverage for orthoses and prostheses.

In 1989 at the age of 17, I contracted a rare bacterial infection called Fulminant Meningococemia. This disease develops rapidly and is extremely severe and, in my case, left me as a left leg below the knee amputee, a right foot trans metatarsal amputee (which means I lost my toes), significant Kidney impairment and severe scarring over 50% of my body.

At the time I got sick, I was a junior in High School and involved in track, the pom squad, student government and training to get my lifeguarding certificate, in hopes to be a beach guard during the summer. My life came to a halt, and I spent the next 3 months at Children's National Hospital fighting for my life and then an additional 3 months at the Alfered I DuPont Hospital for Children. This is where real work began and the world of prosthetics became my new normal, my lifeline, my independence. I relearned how to walk using a prosthesis. From there I went on to finish high school, college, and graduate school.

Although those are fine accomplishments, I never made it on that lifeguard stand. The beach has always been a place of peace and tranquility for me, and I have continued to go but the experience is different. My choice of leg to wear to the beach has either been my everyday leg, which the salt water and sand together deteriorate the components, or an old prosthesis which doesn't fit properly and can ultimately lead to skin breakdown on my leg, which is painful and makes it hard for me to walk. What was once my place of refuge has now become an annoyance. Every time I want to go to the beach, I am risking my safety and my stability.

I know there are prosthetic legs out there that I can have made for me that would allow me to go to the beach without fear. They are designed to withstand the saltwater and the sand. But they are not appropriate for me to wear for any of the other activities I do

every day. My insurance doesn't cover this kind of leg for me, because it is not "medically necessary", and I can't afford to pay for it on my own. My solution has been to wear my everyday leg and deal with the consequences, but I shouldn't have to. With your support, you will be allowing individuals like myself to live our lives, just like you do each and every day, when you go to the beach or the park with your family. I urge you to support HB 865 and to give us in the amputee community our lives back.

Shannon Dillingham