

Date: 02/14/2024

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

Reference: HB0865- Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance- Coverage for Orthoses and Prostheses

Position: **Support/Favorable**

Dear Chair, Peña-Melnyk, and the HGO Committee Members:

My name is Sheryl Sachs, MSPO, CPO. I appreciate the opportunity to comment and urge your support for House Bill 865.

I was born in Maryland, and I currently live in Baltimore County with my husband and beautiful children. While an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park, I had the life-changing opportunity to volunteer at Walter Reed, where I spent time with service members who had lost limbs overseas protecting our freedom. Fast-forward 15 years, I am now a certified prosthetics and orthotics practitioner, and it is my job to work with patients of all ages and backgrounds in Maryland to evaluate them for and provide them medically necessary orthotic & prosthetic care. These customized medical devices, external braces to support limbs or prosthetic legs or arms for patients with limb difference, have the ability restore their freedom of movement.

In our training, like the physicians and physical therapists who we work side-by-side with every day, we are taught to evaluate our patients to provide them the necessary orthoses and prostheses to try to return to a healthy level of activity. Maryland does have existing policies related to coverage for prostheses; however, it does not go far enough (§15–844). The evolving technological advancements over the past 30+ years has come a long way, but access to those advancements has not. Instead of supporting patients, outdated policies and regulations create barriers to access.

As someone who is “able-bodied”, we often do not think about the physical and psychological impacts that living with limb difference and limb loss can have on our peers, our patients, their families, and their communities. My patients inspire me every day as they overcome many of these obstacles, despite the odds stacked against them. Being physically active should not be a luxury—it is a necessity. There is a strong correlation between health and physical activity, and allowing for access to these medically necessary devices will lead to healthier Marylanders. However, with the existing law, the disability community is being discriminated against; the law is telling them it is not their right to be physically active like their able-bodied peers.

By voting favorably for HB0865, you have the ability to not only change the lives and health of children and adults living in Maryland, but you will also be saving the state under the Total Cost

of Care Model hundreds of thousands of dollars. Valid, peer-reviewed research has shown a minimal fiscal impact upfront for coverage for activity-specific orthotic and prosthetic devices. It is important to note that the cost of these devices includes multiple appointments with their clinicians, fitting, education, and adjustments needed for individual's optimal use.

By enabling patients to be physically active with the appropriate technology, you are not only decreasing the risk of physical injury, but you are proactively addressing the psychological ramifications and health implications for an individual who cannot be physically active with the baseline prosthetic and orthotic care that they are currently afforded by insurance.

It is for the reasons stated above that I urge you to support HB0865. Several states have passed similar legislation that ensure individuals have access to these medically necessary devices. We ask the committee vote favorably on HB0865.

Sheryl Sachs, MSPO, CPO
Certified Prosthetist Orthotist