

Date: 02/13/2024

To: Chair Pena-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, Pena-Melnyk and Committee Members:

We write to you today to share our comments on House Bill 865 and to urge your support for this bill. We are a group of patients who use prostheses or orthoses in our daily lives. We want to stress that this bill is **necessary** to facilitate our engagement with the activities that can maintain our health. We are not disabled because we are missing a limb or lack full function in one of our limbs. We are limited in participating in sports and activities beyond walking because we do not have activity-specific devices. With the right devices, we know that we are capable of more. Below is a collection of testimony from a variety of patients and family members of patients who ask for your support of HB0865 (light edits made for readability in square brackets):

- As an amputee for the past 45 years, I have seen technology and accommodations improve greatly through time. I am blessed with access to insurance that covered a vast majority of the expenses associated with my below knee prosthesis. Over the years I would inquire about coverage for swim legs and would learn they weren't covered by my insurance.. That always disappointed me because the alternative was to remove my prosthesis to get into a public pool or into the ocean. I have not always been comfortable doing so and never understood why that accommodation to make me feel whole and on par with everyone else enjoying the water was denied to me. This legislation would be life changing for so many folks who want to enjoy equal access to enjoy public pools, water parks, and natural bodies of water. Yes, the argument can be made that if people like myself want to enjoy those things, all we have to do is remove our prosthetic limb. Frankly, it isn't that simple and we should not have to choose between maintaining our sense of dignity or making ourselves incredibly uncomfortable emotionally and mentally in order to be active participants with other "able bodied" people. Do the right thing, consider the entire picture for us as amputees, and get this done. The decision to approve this legislation will generate such a positive ripple effect for those of us in this community. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my thoughts on this important matter.
- I feel all should have the opportunity to participate and not be left out for any reason.
- Physical activity is essential for prevention of health decline related to depression, general debility, and obesity. These diagnoses drive up the cost of health care, and are preventable, or can be better managed, with exercise and social engagement. Orthotics can make this involvement more attainable and less painful.

- Being able to move [and] run, would open up the world to me. Being able to play with kids' ball again, race them. Not always be a step behind. I need the ability to [be] an active father again.
- This would be life changing. I love the outdoors and would greatly benefit from having different feet to do things like hiking, as well as having an option for swim, and running feet. Because I am a bilateral below the knee amputee I get a lot of kickback and denial, because of the cost so unfortunately, I have never benefited from feet like these but would absolutely love to.
- Dealing with a limb loss is devastating & life changing. Please help us get this approved, so the amputee community can have some normalcy.
- I'm very active, and need multiple legs for different activities like biking and swimming.
- My father, who underwent AKA in his 50s due to aortic dissection, has had reduced life participation due to the limitations of his prosthesis. Previously very athletic, he enjoyed playing on a recreational baseball team which provided not only exercise but a social circle. Due to the inadequacy of his prosthetic equipment, both of these parts of his life have suffered when he still has so much life left to live and so much motivation to do more than he can.

We need this legislation to grant us access to activity-specific prostheses and orthoses. We want to engage in activities that allow us to maintain our health. We share our stories above to urge you to support HB0865.

Thank you for your consideration and your support,

The Orthotics & Prosthetic community in Maryland

Nicole King, MS, CCC-SLP  
Raymond Smyth  
Erin Klein  
Wendy W Claiser  
William Odle  
Saxon Reynolds  
Rebecca Welsh  
Shirley Rankin  
Anthony Gilkerson  
Charles Jackson