



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

Chair: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk

March 5, 2024

House Bill 1259: Health - Health Insurance - Breast and Lung Cancer Screening - Coverage Requirements

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 1259: Health Insurance - Breast and Lung Cancer Screening - Coverage Requirements.

Lung and breast cancer are two of the leading types of cancers found in Americans, with lung cancer being the most fatal. According to data published by the CDC, the incidence of cancer in Maryland is on a downward trend. In 2020, there were approximately 30,603 new cancer diagnoses, which is an almost 12% reduction in cases compared to the 34,988 diagnoses in 2019. The number of deaths from cancer, however, remained the same with roughly 10,800 deaths in both 2019 and 2020 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). The reduction in new cases could be the result of residents making healthier lifestyle choices (i.e. smoking cessation), and therefore improving the health of our communities overall. The unchanging death rate, however, is concerning since the number of deaths have not wavered despite the reduction in new cases. To best address this, early diagnosis and initiation of treatment is crucial.

Breast cancer fortunately is one of the most treatable cancers if caught early. As the second highest type of cancer found in women, if caught early, the survival rate is over 90%. If the cancer is in late stages at time of diagnosis, the chance of survival is reduced to 31% (American Cancer Society, 2024a). The standard protocol for breast cancer states that if a woman receives a mammogram that comes back concerning, they are referred to get a breast biopsy. This is the most conclusive method to properly diagnose the presence and stage of cancer. The majority of Maryland residents cannot afford out of pocket healthcare expenses. Since supplemental breast exams are currently not covered by insurance, many residents are unable to follow-up for proper diagnosis. As for lung cancer, the survival rate for early-stage diagnosis is 65%, and late stage has only a 9% chance of survival (American Cancer Society, 2024b). Given its aggressive nature, the follow-up imaging is vital for patients and healthcare teams to have as it can help curate the best plan of care.

Just like any other health condition, there are severe health disparities that put residents at a disproportionate disadvantage. In Maryland, the counties with the highest incidence and highest mortality rate caused by cancer are all located in rural counties, with the majority along the eastern shore (CDC, n.d.). Because of the positive difference the passing of HB1259 would offer rural Maryland residents, the Maryland Rural Health Association is in favor of HB1259: Health - Health Insurance - Breast and Lung Cancer Screening - Coverage Requirements.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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American Cancer Society. (2024a). *Survival rates for breast cancer.*

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer/understanding-a-breast-cancer-diagnosis/breast-cancer-survival-rates.html>

American Cancer Society. (2024b). *Survival rates for lung cancer.* <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/survival-rates.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.) Annual number of new cancers, 1999-2020: Maryland. <https://gis.cdc.gov/Cancer/USCS/#/Trends/>