



Center for Salud/Health and Opportunity for Latinos

Johns Hopkins Centro SOL

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Testimony in FAVORABLE support of HB 568

TO: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair
Delegate Bonnie Cullison, Vice Chair
House Health & Government Operations Committee

FROM: Centro SOL

DATE: March 11, 2024

Centro SOL supports HB568, Community Health Worker Appreciation Day

Centro SOL (Center for *Salud*/Health and Opportunity for Latinos at Johns Hopkins) is committed to promote equity in health and opportunity for Latinos by developing several patient/community-centered programs that focus on physical and mental health as well as clinical care innovations. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB 568, which would require the Governor to annually proclaim May 8th as Community Health Worker (CHW) Appreciation Day. The proclamation would urge educational and cultural organizations to observe community health workers with informative programs and activities.

Note: This testimony does not necessarily represent the views of Johns Hopkins University.

I have worked with Centro SOL for over a decade and have had the opportunity to develop programs that serve unattended needs of the growing Latino population. CHWs are a social justice response to marginalized communities. Early in 2020, our center started an emergency food distribution program to support hundreds of Latinos in Baltimore who lost their jobs due to the COVID19 pandemic. Reaching out to these Latino families would have not been possible without the community members who were hired as CHWs to conduct needs assessments calling and talking to families who they were connected with in their own language. Similarly, Mental illness such as depression and anxiety in our communities was exacerbated due to the COVID19 pandemic. Our team was able to hire and to train our CHWs, members of the local community, to provide critical language appropriate interventions to address depression to dozens of underinsured Latino patients who did not have mental healthcare access. Without CHWs, depression treatment would have been inaccessible for these individuals. CHWs help build sustainable solutions for healthcare and wellbeing of marginalized communities who do not have access to equitable healthcare. CHWs speak the same language of members in the community and have similar life experiences to the patients we serve, being more effective in providing culturally appropriate care.

Evidence shows that healthcare systems that use the CHWs model are able to lower the cost of healthcare utilization, makes prevention more accessible to everyone, and reduce the charges to



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Medicaid. In states like Colorado at Denver Health Care System, CHWs provided a return of investment of \$2.28 per \$1.00 spent with annual savings of over \$95,000 per patient.¹

CHWs do the field work we desperately need to provide quality care of our underserved patients and reduce care costs in doing that. The Community Health Worker Appreciation Day would recognize their work and would be the first step to building a pathway forward to a more equitable healthcare.

Thank you and I urge the Committee to please **vote YES on HB 568** to declare May 8th as Community Health Worker Appreciation Day in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Monica Guerrero Vazquez, MS, MPH
Executive Director
Centro SOL

¹ Whitley EM, Everhart RM, Wright RA. Measuring return on investment of outreach by community health workers. J Health Care Poor Underserved. Feb 2006;17(1 Suppl):6-15