

Dear Members of the Health and Government Committee:

My name is Dr. Marsha Blakeslee and I am an Internist, practicing in the state of Maryland for the past 30 years. I care for adult patients who come from a myriad of backgrounds and are seeking preventive care and care for an array of medical disorders. The goal is to tailor medical care and recommendations for each individual, knowing that each patient has an underlying special genetic make-up, a unique presentation of that genetic makeup and a unique value system that informs their approach to their own health. In other words, a "one-size-fits all" medical approach is ill advised.

The counsel I provide to my patients is informed by their family history, risks for medical disorders, current medical disorders and medications, lifestyle patterns and their personal value systems. One of the bedrocks of the patient-physician relationship is the concept of informed consent, meaning, the discussion and acceptance or rejection of the risks, benefits, and alternatives to any medical procedure. Bodily autonomy requires that a person can ultimately decide what treatments or procedures they will or will not accept, without fear of any form of discrimination.

Though they hold promise for the future, genetic therapy technology suffers from a range of potential risks. These risks have been seen in research trials over the years. These include off-target effects, where the therapy affects other parts of the human body in an unintended negative way; the potential development of autoimmune disorders since the body recognizes the therapy as a foreign protein; and ultimately, the unknown long-term and generational impact of altering the genetic structure and function of a human.

After appropriate informed consent, an individual may choose to receive or decline genetic materials, therapy, treatment or procedures. No person should face discrimination in any place of public accommodation, educational arena, or employment or place of work, for declining to accept the use of genetic materials into their body in the form of a therapy, treatment, or procedure.

I support HB1422 to protect Maryland residents from all forms of discrimination related to their personal medical decisions and I thank you for allowing me the time to share my concerns.

Dr. Marsha Y. Blakeslee