

ROBBYN LEWIS
Legislative District 46
Baltimore City

Health and Government Operations
Committee

Subcommittees

Health Occupations and Long Term Care
Public Health and Minority
Health Disparities

House Chair

Joint Committee on Program Open Space
and Agricultural Land Preservation



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 424
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3772 · 301-858-3772
800-492-7122 Ext. 3772
Robbyn.Lewis@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB986 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Coverage for
the Treatment of Obesity**
Hearing date: March 6, 2024

Thank you Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. I am Delegate Robbyn Lewis, testifying today on behalf of HB986, which will make treatment for obesity more accessible.

The bill before you requires the State Medical Assistance (Medicaid) Program to provide comprehensive coverage for the treatment of obesity. This includes behavioral therapy, bariatric surgery and FDA-approved anti-obesity medications.

Obesity is a significant public health concern that disparately impacts some Marylanders more than others. Overall, 34% of Marylanders meet the criteria for obesity, but African Americans and Hispanic Americans experience higher rates. Of course, the disparity is driven not by imaginary “racial” factors but rather by barriers to access of healthy food, active transportation and walkable communities.

Obesity is a serious chronic illness linked to over 200 comorbid conditions, such as cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, depression, type 2 diabetes, gout and more. It is a complex disease, in which genetics, the environment, and biology all play important factors.

I must address the fiscal note, which is based on estimated utilization rates. States like Delaware and Pennsylvania have passed similar legislation, but have had lower fiscal impacts. In Pennsylvania, fewer than 2% of the eligible Medicaid population utilized comprehensive obesity treatment. It is conceivable that utilization here in Maryland will be lower than the fiscal note suggests.

Thank you for your consideration. I request a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Delegate Robbyn Lewis