



TESTIMONY TO THE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

HB1143: Emergency Medical Services- Maryland Emergency Department Wait Time Reduction Commission and Standardized Protocols- Establishment

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda Kohn, President

DATE: February 28, 2024

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. **The League believes that health care is a human right, and that every resident should have access to affordable, equitable, quality health care, including emergency care.**

Maryland Emergency Departments (EDs) have some of the highest patient wait times in the nation, with "many reports showing evidence of this problem as far back as 2017, well before the pandemic."¹ **Very long ED wait times can lead to poor patient outcomes, and are also a barrier to care when frustrated patients leave before being seen by medical personnel.**

After the 2023 legislative session, a Hospital Throughput Work Group was formed. Led by the Maryland Hospital Association, the workgroup identified four issues contributing to long ED wait times: hospital capacity, healthcare workforce shortages, the behavioral health crisis, and limited access to healthcare outside of the ED, especially for uninsured Marylanders.

However, the vast majority of patients seen in hospital EDs are discharged home rather than admitted.² Thus, problems with hospital throughput (the transfer of patients between hospital departments or units) are less problematic for the majority of ED patients than are problems within the ED itself. That is why **the League supports House Bill 1143: a bipartisan proposal to establish a Maryland ED Wait Time Reduction Commission in the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services System (MIEMSS).**

This Commission would bring together multiple stakeholders, including front-line workers in the ED, to identify the root causes of Maryland hospitals' very long ED wait time. It would make recommendations -- including on ED staffing and protocols -- that would enhance efficiencies and improve patient care.

Regardless of our age, occupation, or zip code, we may all find ourselves in the ED. Improving the delivery of care in our hospitals' EDs by reducing wait times is important for all of us. **The League of Women Voters Maryland, representing 1,500+ concerned members throughout Maryland, urges a favorable report on House Bill 1143.**

¹ <https://conduitstreet.mdcounties.org/2023/11/22/hurry-up-and-wait-marylands-emergency-room-emergency/>

² <https://hcup-us.ahrq.gov/reports/statbriefs/sb286-ED-Frequent-Conditions-2018.pdf>