

Date: 01/28/2025

To: Chair Peña-Melnyk and Vice Chair Cullison of the Health and Government Operations Committee

Reference: HB0383- Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance- Coverage for Orthoses (So Every Body Can Move Act)

Position: **Support/Favorable**

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk, and the HGO Committee Members:

My name is Sheryl Sachs, MSPO, CPO. I appreciate the opportunity to comment and urge your support for House Bill 383.

It is because of your efforts last year that HB 865, the So Every Body Can Move Act, was signed into law. Individuals across the state will now have access to medically-necessary prostheses for physical activity. It is difficult to put into words how life-changing this increased access to care will have on these individuals. Nathan, who testified at the bill hearing last year, is starting the fitting process for his new baseball leg; his life is forever changed for the better because of your support.

I still work as a certified prosthetics and orthotics practitioner in Maryland, and it is my job to work with patients of all ages and backgrounds in Maryland to evaluate them for and provide them medically necessary orthotic care. These customized medical devices, external braces to support limbs and body segments, have the ability restore their freedom of movement. In our training, like the physicians and physical therapists who we work side-by-side with every day, we are taught to evaluate our patients to provide them the necessary custom orthoses to try to return to a healthy level of activity. However, outdated policies and regulations create barriers to access for our patients to receive equitable care compared to able-bodied peers.

Unless we know someone who wears an orthosis, or have worn one ourselves, we often do not think about the physical and psychological impacts that living with mobility impairments can have on our peers, our patients, their families, and their communities. Clinicians can currently provide patients with everyday custom orthoses, but using these devices for physical activity are not always appropriate. Orthoses for physical activity often times require different materials and control mechanisms during fabrication to allow for safe and proper fit. The use of inappropriate orthoses for these physical activities could lead to individual injury or failure/breaking of the orthosis. By enabling patients to be physically active with the appropriate technology, you are not only decreasing the risk of physical injury, but you are proactively addressing the psychological ramifications and health implications for an individual who cannot be physically active with the baseline orthotic care that they are currently afforded by insurance.

There is a strong correlation between health and physical activity, and allowing for access to these medically necessary devices will lead to healthier Marylanders. Physical inactivity, and the co-morbidities associated with it, are a public health issue across the state that must be addressed. The disability community must know that they have a right to be physically active as their peers, and restricting their access to medically necessary orthoses for physical activity should no longer be a barrier.

By voting favorably for HB0383, you have the ability to not only change the lives and health of children and adults living in Maryland, but you will also be saving the state under the Total Cost of Care Model hundreds of thousands of dollars. Valid, peer-reviewed research has shown a minimal fiscal impact upfront for coverage for activity-specific orthotic devices. It is important to note that the cost of these devices includes multiple appointments with their clinicians, fitting, education, and adjustments needed for individual's optimal use.

My patients inspire me every day, and their ability to be physically active should not be a luxury—it is a necessity. Maryland has the opportunity to be at the forefront of expanded coverage for medically necessary custom orthoses and prostheses. Maryland was the 6<sup>th</sup> state to pass legislation for physical activity prosthesis coverage and now has the opportunity to continue to act as a leader in this effort, providing tangible resources for their enrollees and then using the results to then shape further coverage both in Maryland and the rest of the country. If Marylanders engage in more physical activity, they are likely to become healthier and more engaged citizens.

**It is for the reasons stated above that I urge you to support HB0383.** Maryland should continue to be a leader in ensuring that everyone has access to this important care by expanding coverage for medically necessary custom orthoses for physical activity. We ask the committee vote favorably on HB0383.

Thank you,

Sheryl Sachs, MSPO, CPO  
Certified Prosthetist Orthotist