

**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
HB 871: Health Services Cost Review Commission - Community Benefits -
Community Health Worker Workforce Program**

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 26, 2025**



**Submitted by:
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Community Health Coordinator
Health Care for the Homeless**

Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am here to express my full support for HB0871, a bill that recognizes the vital role of community health workers (CHWs) in improving health outcomes and promoting health equity within our communities. As both a community health worker and a supervisor, I have seen firsthand the transformative impact that CHWs have on the health and well-being of individuals, families, and entire communities. This bill is a critical step in stabilizing and securing that CHW's can continue providing care to those who need it the most. CHWs will have the support that we need to continue this important work without concerns of losing funding or a grant ending.

As a community health worker, I have had the privilege of working directly with individuals who face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, including homelessness. The individuals I work with experience a range of competing challenges and priorities, including economic instability, cultural and language barriers, and chronic health conditions that are often left untreated or undiagnosed. In these settings, the role of the CHW is invaluable. We serve as trusted connectors between patients and the healthcare system, helping individuals navigate complex healthcare processes, providing culturally relevant health education, and offering support for managing chronic conditions.

I met a gentleman last week that is staying in a tent. He was physically assaulted and suffered injuries that left him with limited ability to use one of his arms. He is not able to work because of this injury and does not feel safe living in a shelter. This gentleman is connected to care at Health Care for the Homeless and was willing to talk with me.

In my role as a supervisor, I see how CHWs are able to build trust within communities and create meaningful relationships with patients that go beyond clinical encounters. CHWs don't just educate; we advocate for patients, ensuring they receive the care they need and addressing the social determinants of health that often go unaddressed in traditional healthcare settings. This relationship is so critical for long-term health improvements, as patients are more likely to engage in care when they feel understood and supported.

The provisions in HB0871 that focus on building a sustainable CHW workforce are essential. By allowing nonprofit hospitals and community-based organizations to establish community health worker programs through formal partnerships, this bill helps provide the structure needed for long-term success. However, for these programs to thrive, we must also ensure that CHWs are compensated fairly and receive benefits that support their well-being. Everyone on my team, including myself, have to work a part-time in addition to our full-time positions as CHW's. I can honestly say that I see the commitment my team has to the communities we serve, and this keeps us going every day. We need your support to continue this work.

I have seen the positive results of CHW programs in real-time—whether it's helping a family navigate their medical appointments, providing follow-up care for individuals after a hospital discharge, or guiding someone through a preventative health program. These programs reduce emergency room visits, improve chronic disease management, and, most importantly, empower individuals to take control of their health. With the inclusion of community health worker programs as a recognized "community benefit," this bill will help expand these successful models and extend their reach to more individuals who need them most.

As a community health worker and a supervisor, I strongly urge the committee to pass HB0871. This bill will not only provide greater resources to CHWs, but it will also formalize the important role we play in improving health outcomes and tackling health inequities. With the support of this bill, we can continue to build stronger communities and a more inclusive healthcare system for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lilian Amaya
Community Health Coordinator

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing support services, and housing for over 11,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

*Our Vision: Everyone is healthy and has a safe home in a just and respectful community.
Our Mission: We work to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it.*

For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.