

Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operations
Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

February 28, 2025

Dear Chairs Pena-Melnyk and Beidle,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to you today to thank you for your leadership in expanding access to health care for all Marylanders. As you continue to prioritize the health of Maryland residents, we urge you to pass the Medical Assistance Program - Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity Act (SB0876/HB1489). The legislation would require the State Medical Assistance Program to provide coverage for the treatment of the chronic disease of obesity and the treatment of pre-diabetes, including coverage for intensive behavioral or lifestyle therapy, bariatric surgery, and FDA-approved anti-obesity medication. Over [33% of the adult population in Maryland](#) lives with obesity and could benefit from access to these patient-centered treatment options.

Obesity is a chronic disease that affects the livelihood of many Marylanders. Obesity is linked to [200 medical conditions](#), including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disorders and other largely preventable illnesses. New obesity treatments and medications have the potential to transform the way we treat obesity and potentially prevent these other diseases from affecting our most vulnerable populations. Coverage for this type of care will help approximately [1.6 million people in Maryland](#) who live with obesity and ultimately could protect our state from incurring future medical costs by treating other chronic health illnesses linked to obesity. Ultimately, by investing in these treatments, we will be able to potentially save people from the myriad of health complications associated with obesity. Additionally, such investments offer an opportunity to decrease the costs in treating expensive chronic illnesses.

Treatment for health complications associated with obesity places a financial burden on the patient. We must also recognize that addressing obesity is a health equity priority. Obesity disproportionately impacts communities of color, rural communities, people living with disabilities and other Marylanders facing socioeconomic disparities. Disparities exist not only in obesity prevalence, but also in obesity treatment outcomes focused solely on lifestyle interventions, which can be less effective for racial and ethnic minorities. These disparities are not limited to infectious diseases; racial minorities experience higher rates of chronic diseases, death, and disability compared with white Americans. Expanding care will go a long way in narrowing the health access divide and help close the gap in health equity access.

We have come a long way in our understanding of obesity as a chronic illness and we know that for many, if not most, patients, obesity is not just about behavior– there are long-standing and proven treatments for obesity as well as the latest interventions that have been approved by the FDA. It is time for our notions of how to treat obesity to catch up with science, and for all of us to work together to minimize obesity’s impact on our collective health, economy, and healthcare costs. We

are thankful for your historic leadership in increasing access to health care for Marylanders, and we look forward to working with your office and the legislature in expanding coverage to encompass comprehensive obesity care in the State Medical Assistance Program.

If you have any questions or if you would like more information, please contact Monica Billger, Director, State Government Affairs Mid-Atlantic, at MBillger@diabetes.org.

Sincerely,

American Diabetes Association

American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery

APTA Maryland, A Chapter of the American Physical Therapy Association

Black Nurses of Southern Maryland

Chesapeake Bay Black Nurses Association

Disability Rights Maryland

Greater Baltimore Urban League

Health Care for Wellness LLC

Maryland Association of Diabetes Care & Educations Specialists (ADCES)

Maryland Rural Health Association

NAMI Maryland

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP), MD Chesapeake Chapter

National Black Nurses Association, Inc

National Hispanic Medical Association

Obesity Medicine Association

The Obesity Society

The Y in Central Maryland