

28, February 2025

Dear Delegate Patterson,

My name is James Baker. I am a 24 year old male living with sickle cell disease writing to express my support of House Bill 1306: "Public Health – Sickle Cell Disease – Specialized Clinics and Scholarship Program for Medical Residents".

I live in Gaithersburg, Maryland and work as an Audio Engineer. Despite my sickle cell, I try to find normalcy as a young adult trying to navigate my way in life. When possible, I try to hang out with friends and enjoy life. For much of my life I've had the support of my parents with my Mother especially taking care of all my health needs. She had protected me from the difficulties patients and caregivers living with sickle cell have to face. However, in the 3 years that I've started to manage my care myself, I have been overwhelmed with how truly dizzying it is to find adequate care while still trying to maintain a semi-normal life as I transition to adulthood. In those 3 years, I have changed Hematologists twice; going from the Medstar Georgetown Pediatric Unit, to the Adult Unit at Georgetown, to an entirely new provider at the University of Maryland at Baltimore. I also have gone to several providers in a 30 mile radius to try and get control of my chronic pain, getting turned away either because they don't have the capabilities to handle Sickle Cell patients because no one wants to take a patient who bounced around so many pain management facilities.

I've been prescribed numerous pain medications from NSAIDS, to nerve medications, to narcotics, with little relief and many side effects. I've done acupuncture therapy, had steroid injections, and even been told to meditate. I'm currently in therapy, see a psychiatrist, not to mention the myriad of other specialists I routinely see, as a part of my sickle cell maintenance. I do all of this and still try to live a normal life as a 24 year old. But, doing so has been made near impossible with the amount of appointments I require. Most of my appointments aren't even in the same county which makes life extremely difficult - wages loss, travel expenses, time loss, and stress from the long commute.

The idea of having access to closer and more consistent care specifically for sickle cell patients is not only a massive desire but increasingly becoming a major need not just for me but the many sickle cell patients in Maryland facing similar situations as me. This is why I am in full support of House Bill 1306: "Public Health – Sickle Cell Disease – Specialized Clinics and Scholarship Program for Medical Residents" and implore you to pass this bill so that more clinics can be created like the one in Baltimore at Capital Region Medical Center. I also encourage you to pass this bill to support the staffing and training of sickle cell experts to support clinics in Montgomery County. Recognizing that I may never be free from the pain and complications of sickle cell disease, it is my desire that I may at least have access to care in a way that may provide me with the best possible quality of life.

Sincerely,  
James Baker