

## TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HOUSE BILL 1268

To the Maryland House Delegates:

My name is Brianna, and I am a 17-year-old high schooler suffering with chronic Lyme. I am currently in remission, but the disease is never fully gone. I still get flare ups every month aligned with my hormone regulations. Once a month, for around five days, I cannot walk due to the damage Lyme has done. I had two strains of Lyme disease, and I have suffered with other coinfections like Babesia and Bartonella. We have tried almost everything to get rid of the infection, yet nothing has completely gotten rid of my symptoms, though we've been on the hunt to relieve my persisting pain for years.

My symptoms are debilitating, as well as the mental toil it takes on me. I cannot go to school in flares because the pain is so severe. I feel like my teachers despise me because of how often I miss school, and they have to do extra work to catch me back up that they are not paid for doing. I feel terribly guilty because of this, and I hate asking for help. Lyme is a quiet disease; you can't ask for help because there is nothing ordinary people can do. Except for you. You can save people from going through chronic Lyme. If you catch it early enough, there is not really an issue.

In my case, we caught it far too late. I had only found a tick on myself when I was around seven years old and went on a field trip in my summer camp to the park. I never had a bullseye mark, which is "the tell-tale sign of Lyme disease". The only problem with that is that is that the Minnesota Department of Health says, "The rash has been reported in about 60 to 80 percent of Lyme disease cases. Not everyone with Lyme disease gets the rash. Sometimes the rash does not have a bull's eye appearance." How could anybody know if they have Lyme if there's no sign until it's too late?

People don't even know about Lyme either; that's what's so scary. When you're a kid you get told not to go in the woods without bug spray and to always check your body for ticks, but why? Nobody tells you that if you don't you get a debilitating disease. Lyme education is so minimal despite the disease and its coinfections being so common.

These diseases are incredibly difficult to kill; that's the point of their existence. They have particularly adapted to their environment to be able to resist the predictability of medications like doxycycline. This is an example of bacterial persistence; the ability of a bacteria to resist antibiotics or other antimicrobial treatment, which is a phenomenon noted in many other diseases such as E. coli in a 2004 study published by Balaban et al. This phenomenon is also widely recognized and documented by the NIH.

Four weeks of this medication does not necessarily kill every toxin, especially if the case is chronic. About a week to two weeks of doxycycline is what is covered by insurance now. According to Project Lyme and the New England Journal of Medicine, "Zero studies show that *Borrelia Burgdorferi*, the causative agent of Lyme Disease, can be fully eradicated from the body." Project Lyme also says that "an abundance of evidence suggests that B. Burgdorferi can persist against the CDC's currently recommended antibiotic treatment."

BMJ published a study that concludes approximately 14 percent of the world's population has or had Lyme Disease. Not all of that 14 percent can be cured with antibiotics, as the disease can be resistant to it. The remaining percent that failed to catch it fast enough are stuck with financial toils and stress by having no insurance coverage for their skyrocketing medical expenses and the physical symptoms that could prevent them from being able to go to work and make that money back.

Now, I have no savings for medical school because we have had to use all of this money for my health. Many people can't even afford the treatment and just suffer, so I'm one of the lucky ones. The reason I want to go to medical school is to help people also afflicted with Lyme or diseases like it, as it is extremely difficult to find a doctor who is Lyme literate. My dream is to make Lyme known and understood, and you can be a key player in that goal.

I see every time I get a Lyme treatment that the cost is high as well as not covered whatsoever by insurance companies. People must recognize that Lyme is a relatively common disease and will not be disappearing any time soon, and the passing of this bill is crucial to ensuring Lyme disease is not ignored. These symptoms are real and persist as does the disease

itself. Insurance should be able to help people dealing with this disease rather than add more stress to what is already there.

The point of this bill is to get a whole round of antibiotics such as doxycycline covered by insurance, which would help immensely and prevent unnecessary suffering by people just like me. An insurance-covered round of doxycycline, especially for people who find the disease early, may be the difference between remission and years of debilitation. In the long run, best case scenario is insurance covers all the medical treatments necessary to put Lyme disease in remission, so this is the first step in making history.

Treatment should not be a privilege; it should be a right.

Thank you.

Brianna Lapp