February 25, 2025
Judiciary Committee
Bill Number: HB0868
Granny's Law
Vote: Fav
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Written and Oral Testimony In Support of Granny's Law HB0868
In Support of Legislation to Increase Funding for Addressing Health Disparities Among African Americans and Other Minorities, with a Special Focus on Children in Foster Care, Individuals Living with Cancer, and Their Families

Honorable Chairperson, Vice Chair, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today in strong support of this critical legislation aimed at securing more funding to address the devastating health disparities that disproportionately impact African Americans and other minority communities. This issue is not abstract for me—it is deeply personal. My name is Dr. Paula S. Langford, and I come before you as a dedicated clinical social worker, neuroscience coach, and advocate for holistic mental health interventions. With over three decades of experience in child welfare, social work, and community healing, I am here to offer my full support for this critical legislation that seeks increased funding to combat health disparities affecting African Americans and other minority communities.

I stand before you not just as an advocate but as a witness to the unrelenting loss and suffering caused by systemic healthcare inequities in the Black community.

My maternal grandparents, James and Pauline Joyner Lyles, both succumbed to lung cancer.

My niece, Kimberly Merrill, passed away from breast cancer, leaving behind four children, all under the age of twelve.

My brother, a proud United States Army veteran, lost his battle with lung and brain cancer in 2023.

And on April 11, 2024, after years of fighting ovarian cancer—only to later develop breast cancer—my mother ultimately succumbed to lung cancer.

These are just a few of my immediate family members whom I have had to bury within the past five years. The weight of this loss is compounded by the reality that these deaths—like so many in the Black community—were not inevitable. They were worsened by a medical system that undervalues Black bodies, delays diagnoses and fails to provide equitable preventative care, financial compensation, and culturally appropriate research and treatment options.

The Disproportionate Impact on Foster Children and Families

Health disparities do not only affect individuals—they tear families apart, leaving behind vulnerable children who often end up in the child welfare system.

Jennifer's grandmother dedicated years working in the juvenile justice system and directly witnessed how children in foster care are often there because their parents could not access adequate healthcare—either due to financial barriers, racial bias, or medical neglect.

Too many Black and minority parents and grandparents have died prematurely, leaving behind children who now navigate a system that was never designed to meet their emotional, psychological, and physical health needs.

Even when foster children receive medical care, it is often delayed, substandard, or lacking in trauma-informed and culturally competent approaches.

The Struggles of Black Cancer Patients and Families

The disparities extend beyond access to treatment—they manifest in misdiagnoses, delayed interventions, and a lack of culturally relevant patient education.

Black patients are more likely to be diagnosed at later stages of cancer due to medical biases and disparities in preventative screenings.

They often receive less aggressive treatment recommendations, leading to higher mortality rates.

Financial devastation follows as families deplete savings, lose employment, and fall into medical debt, all while grieving their loved ones.

This is to say nothing of the many Black Deaf patients I have personally witnessed struggling to communicate with doctors, left to rely on written notes from medical staff or interpretation by their children (CODAs—Children of Deaf Adults). Imagine receiving a life-altering diagnosis in a language you struggle to understand without the dignity of proper communication support fully.

A Call for Legislative Action

We cannot afford to look away from these crises. This legislation is a necessary and urgent step toward equity. Increased funding would allow for:

1. Culturally competent cancer care programs that focus on early detection, preventative screenings, and tailored treatment plans for African Americans and minorities.
2. Expanded mental health and healthcare services for foster children, ensuring they receive trauma-informed, holistic care.
3. Targeted financial relief and assistance programs for families burdened by medical expenses.
4. Investment in Black-centered medical research and data analysis, ensuring studies address our community's specific needs rather than relying on outdated or Eurocentric models.
5. Stronger protections and accessibility measures for Black Deaf patients and other marginalized groups in healthcare settings.

We Must Act Now

The mental, emotional, and financial toll of these disparities is unsustainable. The cycle of neglect, loss, and inadequate care must be broken. Passing this legislation is a step toward justice, healing, and survival for communities that have been overlooked for far too long.

I urge this committee to stand on the right side of history by supporting this bill. Thank you for your time and dedication to this vital issue.

Thank you