



March 20, 2026

Maryland Senate  
Finance Committee  
Re: House Bill 882  
Written testimony in support of the bill

I'm Dr. Cynthia Baur, Director of the Maryland Consumer Health Information Hub, and Endowed Chair and Director of the Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy, University of Maryland School of Public Health. The Hub is a legislatively mandated project managed by the Horowitz Center. We are part of the state's land grant higher education system with a public service mission, and the Center has served Marylanders since 2007.

I urge a favorable vote on HB882 for three reasons. First, the state of Maryland still needs the Consumer Information Hub, which is scheduled to sunset in June 2026, and HB882 allows the Hub to continue, although without dedicated funding. The Health Committee (formerly Health and Government Operations) created and funded the Hub in 2022 with HB1082, which included the sunset clause. The Hub is making good progress in expanding access to clear, useful public information for all Marylanders, but there is much more work to do. Annual evaluation reports showing the Hub's progress are available on the Horowitz Center's website in the Hub section.

In its brief existence, the Hub has helped implement high priority public information activities in Maryland, such as the plain language recommendations from the Maryland Commission on Public Health and Governor Moore's Executive Order that directs state agencies to use plain language in public communication. The Hub has also advocated for increased investments in translating materials and providing interpreter services so that all Marylanders can access public information. We have provided thousands of hours of training, technical assistance, and writing services to hundreds of Maryland organizations that create and distribute public information. We can do even more if the Hub continues.

Second, the Hub supports Maryland healthcare professionals and service delivery organizations. We provide plain language training that improves the ability of the state's health professionals to communicate effectively with patients and the public. Health professionals receive years of scientific and clinical training but little to no communication training, even though communicating health and medical information to the public and patients is a large part of their jobs. The Hub's training activities help fill this gap in health professional education and professional development.

Third, as Maryland organizations improve their public communication, they can help individuals, families, and communities become better informed and prepared to act on health recommendations and use health services. Examples of how clear communication can help include giving patients plain language medication instructions so they

understand why the medicines matter and how to take them as prescribed; explaining clearly how and why diabetes and other prevention programs can help them feel better in the present and save them years of poor health and expensive treatments; knowing when the emergency department, urgent care or primary care is the best option; and breaking down complex health insurance information.

When people don't understand how to take care of their health, we see personal and system level costs: less healthy individuals, more expensive use of healthcare services, and less use of preventive services. Investing in clear communication and a more prepared and informed public can be achieved without adding more hospital beds or paying for more expensive medical care; indeed, if we use health literacy to cultivate a culture of prevention and an informed public, the long-term result can be a patient-centered system in line with the state's healthcare goals and AHEAD model.

Also, the Hub advances Maryland's health equity goals by giving everyone, no matter their education level, disability status, or literacy and numeracy skills, access to plain language information. It's a "universal precautions" approach to communication when we use plain language with everyone. The reality is the gap is large between the public's literacy and numeracy skills and the skills they need to understand and use information. In Maryland, only one-third of our eighth graders have proficient reading skills and 25% have proficient math skills, according to the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress. Our eighth graders become teen-agers and young adults not only making health decisions for themselves but also for others as they form families and provide care for parents and other relatives and friends. These activities are the core of health literacy, an essential part of what shapes Maryland's health outcomes.

The Hub is uniquely positioned to build Maryland's health literacy infrastructure and support clear, useful information for Marylanders. The COVID-19 pandemic shows what happens when people don't know about or trust information for their health decisions. We are a small Center with only one state-funded position for the Director. During the last 2.5 years, we have used the Hub funding to build infrastructure, networks, health professionals' skills, and organizational capacity, and the momentum is strong. By continuing the Hub, Maryland positions itself as the national leader in a statewide approach to a health literate public. I urge a favorable vote on HB 882.

*Cynthia Baur*