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## Testimony

**Date:** February 17, 2026

**Bill:** HB 813/SB 0496 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program: Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity

**Committee:** House Health and Senate Finance Committees

**Position:** SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT (Oral Testimony)

Good afternoon Chair and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee.

My name is Barbara Hoffstein, and I am a Licensed and Registered Dietitian testifying today on behalf of the Maryland Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND) in support of House Bill 813 with an amendment to include coverage for Medical Nutrition Therapy. MAND represents more than 1,000 Registered Dietitians (RDs) across a variety of practice areas in the state of Maryland.

Obesity is a complex chronic disease associated with numerous health conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers, and affects more than one-third of adults in Maryland. MAND strongly supports ensuring access to comprehensive, multidisciplinary obesity care, including pharmacologic therapies, bariatric surgery, and evidence-based lifestyle and behavioral interventions such as Intensive Behavioral Therapy (IBT) and Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT). HB 813 includes coverage for IBT, bariatric surgery, and weight-loss medications — all important tools. However, comprehensive clinical nutrition care is missing. While IBT includes general nutrition guidance as part of its behavioral framework, it is not designed to provide the individualized, clinical nutrition intervention delivered through MNT. MNT is an evidence-based, personalized approach to prevent, manage, and treat medical conditions, including obesity.

Research shows that lifestyle interventions are a critical component of comprehensive obesity care. A systematic review of 62 randomized controlled trials found that patients receiving Registered Dietitian–led care achieved greater weight loss, reduced blood pressure, and improved quality of life compared to those who did not.

Registered Dietitians provide targeted dietary strategies to help patients better tolerate medications and remain on treatment longer. By adjusting meal timing, portion sizes, food textures, and nutrient composition, Registered Dietitians can reduce nausea and improve digestive comfort, an individualized approach that extends beyond IBT’s broader and more generalized focus on behavioral change.

To ensure patients receive the full spectrum of evidence-based treatment, we respectfully urge you to support HB 813 with an amendment to include coverage for Medical Nutrition Therapy. Doing so will help Maryland align with best practices in obesity care, improve patient outcomes, and support sustainable, long-term solutions for individuals managing obesity.

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