

February 13, 2026

RE: Medicaid Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity

To Whom It May Concern,

I am an Obesity Medicine physician and director of the Johns Hopkins Healthful Eating, Activity and Weight Program in Baltimore, Maryland. The Healthful Eating, Activity and Weight Program is a comprehensive medical weight management clinic that serves a diverse population of patients in the greater DC/Baltimore metropolitan area as well as surrounding states. The purpose of my letter is to request approval of Maryland Senate Bill 496, which would require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide comprehensive coverage for the treatment of obesity, including FDA-approved anti-obesity medications beginning January 1, 2027.

Currently the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) restricts the use of medications to treat obesity by the Maryland Medical Assistance Program. Removing coverage restrictions for anti-obesity medications would help enable physicians like myself to practice evidence-informed care for patients and allow Maryland to better address the obesity epidemic from a public health and cost perspective.

Obesity affects 34% of adults and 17.8% of children ages 6-17 years old in the state of Maryland.^{1,2} The Maryland adult obesity rate is projected to increase to 50% of the population by 2030.

Obesity is not an insular disease. It is a key driver of many serious health conditions, including several cancers, heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. Furthermore, obesity is expensive. Health care expenses from obesity are estimated to reach nearly \$30.54 billion annually in Maryland.³ As you consider the overall health and well-being of Maryland residents, these numbers are impossible to ignore.

The medical community and major public health entities recognize obesity as a chronic disease, requiring multimodal treatment and prevention efforts.⁴ In recent years, the FDA has approved several therapies for the treatment of obesity, meant to be used in conjunction with lifestyle changes. These treatment options have been revolutionary in helping patients reverse obesity along with its myriad health complications. These truly life-changing medications have

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). BRFSS Prevalence & Trends Data: Home. BRFSS Prevalence & Trends Data. <https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/brfssprevalence/>

² State of Childhood Obesity. (2024) Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. <https://stateofchildhoodobesity.org/>

³ Obesity Action Coalition. (2019). Maryland Obesity Fact Sheet. <https://www.obesityaction.org/wpcontent/uploads/maryland.pdf>

⁴ Powell-Wiley et al. (2021). Obesity and Cardiovascular Disease: A Scientific Statement from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 143(21):984-1010. <https://doi.org/10.1161/CIR.0000000000000973>

unfortunately been out of reach for our most vulnerable Maryland residents due to the COMAR restriction.

A 2024 study found that adults with employer-sponsored insurance with a weight loss of 5% were estimated to spend a mean of \$670 less on health care (8% less), and those with a weight loss of 25% spent an estimated mean of \$2849 less on health care (34% less). Anti-obesity medications have proven to support greater weight loss magnitude and weight loss maintenance over lifestyle interventions alone. Medication supported weight loss typically exceeds 15-20% compared to lifestyle supported weight loss, which typically leads to 5-10% weight loss, with 80% weight regain over 5 years.^{5,6}

Passage of Senate Bill 496 is a critical step allowing providers to deliver the standard of care for patients with obesity in the Maryland Medical Assistance Program. Allowing patients and providers to access the full range of treatment options, including anti-obesity medications, will have a critical impact on Marylanders living with obesity as well as healthcare expenditures associated with this costly disease.

If I can provide further details or answer any questions, please reach out to me at srajago7@jhu.edu or 713-724-9767.

Sincerely,

Selvi Rajagopal

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The views expressed in this testimony do not necessarily reflect the views of Johns Hopkins University and the affiliate's opinions are their own.

⁵ Gudzone KA, Kushner RF. Medications for Obesity: A Review. *JAMA*. 2024;332(7):571–584. doi:10.1001/jama.2024.10816

⁶ Hall, K. D., & Kahan, S. (2018). Maintenance of Lost Weight and Long-Term Management of Obesity. *The Medical clinics of North America*. 102(1), 183–197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mcna.2017.08.012>