

Testimony in Favor of HB 1316 – by Edward Fischman, for Our Revolution Maryland

To Chair Bagnall, Vice-Chair Cullison, and the Members of the Health Committee:

I am Edward Fischman, a long-time resident and activist in Montgomery County, and a leader in Our Revolution Maryland. I want to thank Delegate Ruth and her co-sponsors for bringing forward this long overdue, but also very timely legislation.

Our Revolution has been advocating for universal, single payer health coverage since the group came into being a decade ago. In Maryland, Senator Paul Pinsky led an effort in the legislature to move forward with the necessary administrative process to adopt universal coverage here. We were able to get real conversation around the policy in the following year, as our Chair, Ben Jealous included this as a signature piece of his campaign agenda. He received over a million votes for Governor, more than any non-incumbent had ever received.

In the intervening years, the effort stalled. Legislation was pared back, seeking a study on the feasibility and potential impact of such a proposal. Each year, a bill has come before the House, but the bill has never advanced.

However, in 2026, we live in a very different era – a new reality. The cost of purchasing insurance on the private market has escalated, and the ongoing Republican assault on the Affordable Care Act has meant the elimination of subsidies which had benefited millions across the country. With over 10,000 Marylanders losing their jobs in the wave of cuts at the federal level, and the big hits local private firms have taken as a result, it should be clear to everyone that the current status quo in the health care market is untenable. Especially in Maryland.

Undoubtedly, the changed circumstances had a lot to do with Rep. Delaney signing on as a co-sponsor of the US House Medicare for All bill, and with Sen. Van Hollen recently joining as a co-sponsor of the US Senate bill, after more than 2 decades in Washington. It will be an issue in the upcoming highly competitive primary for the 5th Congressional District seat.

The politics of the issue has clearly shifted in Washington, but it seems highly unlikely that even a Democratic Congress and President in 2029 would move to switch the nation away from the for-profit insurance model. Without GOP support, they would have to scrap the filibuster, which may be even more controversial than reforming the largest industry in America.

Maryland cannot wait and just hope the federal government will move on a policy that President Harry Truman first proposed nearly 80 years ago. It is a policy Democrats have consistently favored, but that electeds in Congress have failed to even get to a floor vote.

That is why we are here today, to urge the General Assembly to take the first steps to prepare Maryland for this long overdue shift. We are not asking you to make this dramatic shift without having a full understanding of what it will entail, and what the impact is likely to be.

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That is why it is so important to initiate the study called for in HB 1316. It is not a vote to adopt a not-for-profit model for all of Maryland. It is a vote to have real experts prepare a study.

I could argue here about why I believe a public plan is a better system than our current, failing, wildly expensive system, but what would be the point? We are here to ask for an expert study. Nothing more. A study that we desperately need now, more than ever before.

The study would just be the starting point for a conversation here in the General Assembly, in the Administration, and among the businesses and residents of Maryland. It is a conversation I know Marylanders are waiting on. I am a member of the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee. I know that Marylanders are anxious about their coverage, and I know that many of them want to move to a public plan. They talk about it with friends and family, and they talk about it with me, but that is not enough. Based on experience, we know there is little chance of the Assembly taking up substantive legislation without seeing a detailed study.

I believe that ANY serious study of the issue will commend the legislature to adopt a universal coverage plan, because it makes so much more sense than the current profit-based marketplace. But please do not take my word for it. I do not want to get ahead of the research. Let the experts study whether this will work for Maryland.

Do not fear the outcome of the study. If it proves to be a clearcut endorsement of the idea, then it would be common sense to embrace it. Let us see what the study will tell us. It is both long past time and very much the right time to take this step and restart the conversation here in Annapolis.

I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1316.