

House Bill 178 – Public Health – Sickle Cell Disease – Specialized Clinics and Scholarship Program for Medical Residents

POSITION: Favorable with Amendments

February 10, 2026
Health Committee

The University of Maryland Medical System (“UMMS”) strongly supports House Bill 178 – Public Health – Sickle Cell Disease – Specialized Clinics and Scholarship Program for Medical Residents, with clarifying amendments. House Bill 178 (“HB 178”) proposes to address a long-standing gap in care for Marylanders living with sickle cell disease by requiring the Maryland Department of Health to establish specialized clinics dedicated to comprehensive sickle cell disease (“SCD”) care and a scholarship program to grow the workforce of clinicians trained in classical hematology with a focus on sickle cell care.

The University of Maryland Capital Region Health (“UM CRH”) is a statewide leader in sickle cell disease care through its Adult Sickle Cell Clinic. The clinic is Prince George’s County’s only dedicated adult sickle cell clinic, serving a population with one of the highest prevalences of SCD in the state, and provides a multidisciplinary program offering comprehensive services, including disease-modifying therapies, infusion services, transfusion coordination, pain management, and social support. Since opening in March 2023, the Adult Sickle Cell Clinic has achieved remarkable outcomes, including:

- 63 percent reduction in emergency department utilization for sickle cell–related care,
- 30 percent reduction in inpatient admissions compared to the prior year,
- 350 percent increase in outpatient visits, reflecting improved engagement in preventive and longitudinal care, and
- More than 300 unique patients have been served to date.

These outcomes demonstrate that specialized, coordinated outpatient care works for improving health outcomes and enabling patients to remain engaged in work, school, and community life. Specialized sickle cell clinics are critical to the health of Maryland’s communities because sickle cell disease is a complex, lifelong condition that demands coordinated, multidisciplinary care to manage pain, prevent complications, and reduce unnecessary emergency room utilization. Patients often face significant barriers to accessing consistent, high-quality care close to home, and these barriers contribute to worse health outcomes and higher costs when care is delayed or fragmented. The clinic model outlined in this bill, including routine care, behavioral health services, pain management, telehealth access to specialists, and partnerships with community organizations, reflects best practices in comprehensive SCD management and aligns with successful national hub-and-spoke care frameworks.

To strengthen this legislation and ensure its long-term success across the State, UMMS respectfully proposes the following amendments:

1. **Clarify that funding may be directed to expand existing specialized sickle cell care hubs to establish “spokes”** rather than requiring the creation of entirely new standalone clinics. This approach will leverage current clinical expertise and infrastructure (e.g., at major centers) to build a hub-and-spoke network that more efficiently reaches underserved regions.
2. **Amend the bill to require the Department of Health to conduct a statewide needs assessment** that evaluates geographic areas most in need of additional sickle cell clinic services based on patient numbers, travel burden, proximity to existing specialized care, and health outcomes.
3. **Clarify in statute that the funding stream authorized under this bill is intended to be ongoing, not limited to a one-year appropriation.** By explicitly directing the Governor and General Assembly to include appropriate recurring appropriations in future budget bills, the State will ensure long-term sustainability of these critical services and avoid disruptions in care.

Implementing these amendments will enhance the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of the specialized sickle cell clinic network envisioned by HB 178. Thank you for your consideration of these improvements and for the General Assembly’s continued leadership in expanding access to high-quality care for all Marylanders living with sickle cell disease.

For these reasons, the University of Maryland Medical System strongly supports HB 178 with clarifying amendments, and respectfully requests a *favorable* report on the bill.

For more information, please contact:

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