



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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March 2, 2026

The Honorable Heather Bagnall, Chair
Health Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of House Bill 1367**: Commission on Re-Imagining Health Care in Maryland

Dear Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee:

House Bill 1367 establishes a Commission to envision a new statewide healthcare system that would embody an integrated care model and reflect a patient-centered approach focused on care quality and access. HB1367 also focuses on the financial sustainability of the recommended model, recognizing that healthcare costs have a direct impact on how patients receive care.

This study is coming at a time when counties throughout the state are experiencing high emergency room wait-times and physician (particularly primary care) and nursing shortages. Howard County's population, like many other counties, is also aging, which puts further strain on healthcare demand. Recognizing these challenges, Howard County has taken bold steps to improve patient outcomes that include implementing prevention efforts, examining Howard County's provider network, and strengthening hospital care.

We spend approximately \$100,000 per year to support the ongoing health needs of multi-visit patients. These are patients who had previously visited an emergency department more than three times. Since this investment, the Maryland Health Services Cost Review Commission has reported that our lone hospital, Howard County Medical Center (HCMC), has the second-lowest multi-visit rate in the state at 17 percent of all patients. In addition, residents served by our Mobile Integrated Health program have experienced an 85 percent reduction in 911 calls, 83 percent decrease in inpatient admissions, and 75 percent reduction in emergency department visits for these patients.

We also work very closely with HCMC to expedite emergency room care and streamline hospital throughput. Notably, we have committed \$15 million to support construction of a 29-bed Observation Unit designed to decrease emergency department wait times and improve patient throughput. And we worked with the Maryland Hospital Association (MHA) to establish a discharge suite that, since inception, has accelerated inpatient discharges and freed acute care beds more efficiently. And recognizing the integration of physical and behavioral healthcare, we invested \$2 million to expand behavioral health capacity in the emergency room to address psychiatric boarding.

Finally, our Provider Forum, established in 2025, has brought together providers, agencies, and community leaders to develop a unified vision for Howard County's local healthcare system. This group is exploring many of the same themes that a statewide Commission would study, including navigation barriers, uninsured rates, and workforce shortages just to name a few.



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Designing a new healthcare system is a difficult task that requires tackling many different, and sometimes competing, problems at once. Our investments and efforts in Howard County can provide the Commission with case studies that could potentially be scaled up and considered as part of a new model. For the reasons outlined above, I urge the Committee's **support for HB1367**.

Respectfully,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive