



TESTIMONY TO THE HEALTH COMMITTEE

HB 1251: Health Facilities and Health Insurance- Palliative Care- Required Access and Coverage (Edna G. Neal Palliative Care Act)

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. It believes that all Maryland residents should have access to affordable, equitable, quality health care throughout their lifetimes. It is also fully committed to equity, to ensure that everyone is treated with dignity and respect. **The League thus supports House Bill 1251: Health Facilities and Health Insurance- Palliative Care- Required Access and Coverage**, which would expand the availability of comprehensive palliative care services throughout the state.

Palliative care focuses on providing relief from both the physical and emotional symptoms of an illness. It works to prevent and relieve the pain and suffering of the patient and family, and thus is not defined by time limits or the stage of a disease, as is hospice care. Palliative care treatment can be initiated at the first diagnosis of a serious, progressive, life-limiting condition such as cancer, sickle cell, or neurodegenerative disease, or at the end of a patient's life. "The aim is to help people achieve the best quality of life they can, for as long as possible, and to help them do what matters most to them. It is aimed at the prevention and relief of suffering, and the early identification, detailed assessment, and re-evaluation of physical, psycho-social and spiritual issues."¹

Passage of Health Bill 1251 would ensure that patients and families throughout Maryland are informed of their right to the help, guidance and support offered by palliative care services. It would expand its currently limited statewide access, by considering it now as a standard component of medical care, covered by health insurance. Services could not be denied if a patient is pursuing curative treatment, and it would not be limited to end-of-life care. **Palliative care treatment offers hope. It can transform patients' and families' experience of a life-changing, life-limiting illness, and the stress, fear, and suffering that accompanies it. The League and its 2,000 members strongly urge a favorable report on House Bill 1251.**

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK599374/>