

Date: 02/10/2026

To: Chair Bagnall and Vice Chair Cullison of the House Health Committee

Reference: HB0445- Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance - Coverage for Orthoses and Prostheses (So Every Body Can Move Act)

Position: **Support/Favorable**

Dear Chair Bagnall, and Committee Members:

We are grateful for the opportunity to share our comments on House Bill 445 and to encourage your support for this piece of legislation. We are a group of individuals who work for O&P companies and our patients include individuals who require evaluation for and fitting of custom orthoses. We all interface with patients with a wide range of diagnoses who require orthoses, as clinicians who directly serve our patients, technicians who fabricate their unique custom orthotic devices, or administrators who keep our offices running smoothly.

Every day, we work alongside our patients in their hardships and struggles to reach their goals. We do our best to support them in reaching their goals, whether that be standing, walking, returning to work, running, swimming, or the many other activities our patients desire to engage in. We have seen firsthand the impact that having the right device has on a patient's life. Having the right device can make an enormous difference in a patient's mental, emotional, and physical health.

This has been reinforced by the passing of HB 865 during the 2024 legislative session, which requires coverage for medically necessary prostheses for physical activity. For the past year, we have been able to provide activity-specific prostheses to our patients, allowing them to safely run for the first time, participate on their club lacrosse team, participate in water sports at the beach with their families, and attend spin class without risk of their prosthesis falling off. We know that these devices are lifechanging, and we want to be able to provide the same level of care for our orthotic patients when it is medically necessary to do so. Below is a collection of testimony from a variety of individuals who ask for your support of HB 445:

- As an O&P fabrication technician it is very important to know what type of activities the patient will be doing with the device. If it's for a higher activity device, I use different materials and fabrication techniques to make a suitable device for that specific case. When it's a higher activity patient, I use stronger and energy returning materials like carbon fiber and Nyglass. If the device will be used for walking, I might elect to use thermoplastic but if they need more strength for running, I would use a thermoset resin and carbon fiber. Every patient has a different shape, size limb and

use case that I make a custom device for. Some patients require nighttime stretching braces but then need different braces with different functions and features during the day to walk. All the devices are custom made and custom fit for every patient's special requirements and unique use cases.

- Often times activity specific devices can aid not only in physical activity for the patients but also reduce wear and tear on their everyday device, especially it is exposed to elements (like water) that their everyday device is not exposed to as often or for as long a period.
- I am writing to urge your support for the Orthoses Bill. Access to proper orthotic care is a fundamental right that empowers individuals with disabilities to lead healthy, active, and independent lives. Please vote in favor of this essential legislation.
- For more than twelve years working in patient care in the field Prosthetics and Orthotics, I've seen firsthand that movement is medicine. Devices are not optional for the individuals we serve—they are essential tools for health, independence, and participation in daily life. Yet current coverage policies assume one single device can meet every need, which does not reflect how people live or how mobility actually works.

Just as anyone without mobility impairments uses different footwear for work, exercise, and recreation, orthotic users need activity-specific devices to safely participate in the full range of their lives. A device built for stability during long work shifts is often too heavy for sports or too rigid for low-impact exercise; likewise, a lightweight device designed for movement does not offer the structural support needed for daily standing or ambulation. Limiting individuals to one orthosis forces them to choose between their health, their hobbies, their family engagement, and their independence.

The So Every Body Can Move Act expansion recognizes that access to multiple orthoses is not a luxury but a form of preventative care that reduces injuries, delays secondary complications, supports mental health, and encourages community participation. After years in this field, I know that improving orthotic access is one of the most effective and cost-saving interventions we can offer. Everyone deserves the right—and the tools—to move in ways that support their health and identity.

- Activity specific orthoses are absolutely essential to a high quality of life and save money by increasing mobility and recreation and fitness and reducing the expense related to poor health and fitness.
- Often times the best orthotic device for walking is not accessible, efficient, or functional for exercise, recreation, therapeutic training, or travel. For example, I

have one young patient who does very well with toe-walking SMOs for daily wear and walking, allowing him to normalize his gait pattern and support his arches to prevent skin breakdown and deformity, but this device does restrict his ankle motion making it very difficult to run. This young boy loves to run and participates in the Special Olympics for track. He has to run without his SMOs on to allow him to move his ankles properly, but he is limited then by his hyperpronation ankle instability. A different type of brace that would support is ankle without restricting his mobility would be ideal for running, but is not ideal for training his typical walking pattern. This is a great scenario of when activity specific orthoses would be greatly beneficial.

I have another patient who exercises in the water daily. He wears a custom KAFO for daily walking to control his weakness and instability at the knee and ankle, but he cannot submerge his KAFO in water without damaging it. He was fortunate enough to be able pay for his own secondary AFO, which he uses in the water to control his severe varus ankle instability and foot drop. His knee does not require as much the support in the water and the orthosis is specially designed to withstand submersion without failure. He is very successful exercising with an AFO in the water, but continues to need the KAFO for walking on land. This was a financial burden for the patient, and many people are not able to afford access to special use orthoses.

- Insurance carriers already put so many limitations on these devices- they need more to do more!
- I am writing to express my strong support for legislation that expands access to activity-specific orthoses. Just as most people rely on different types of shoes for different activities—running, hiking, or formal events—individuals with upper or lower extremity impairments often need more than one orthotic device to participate fully in daily life. Their primary orthosis may provide essential support, yet it is not always suited for activities such as running, skating, or swimming, and can even restrict movement during these tasks.

Providing access to secondary, activity-specific orthoses empowers people with physical impairments to engage in the same diverse range of activities as their peers. These devices help optimize function, promote health, and support inclusion in community life. I respectfully urge you to support this bill and help ensure that individuals who rely on orthoses have the tools they need to thrive.

- It brings me much joy as an O&P employees to witness our patients moving to have a great quality of life.
- Quality of life is so important!

- Just as we don't wear the same shoes to work and to the gym, we shouldn't expect one orthotic device to meet the demands of every activity. Activity-specific orthoses support movement more effectively, encouraging mobility and improving long-term health benefits.
- Along with a love for the field of Orthotics and Prosthetics, adaptive sport is a huge passion of mine that requires creative solutions for individuals of differing abilities. Specifically, therapeutic horsemanship where individuals of differing physical abilities and disabilities gain cognitive, emotional and physical strength through riding. The use of activity-specific orthotics of a variety of kinds provides support, function and protection for joints. A heavy-duty wrist driven orthosis is a great example of an activity-specific orthosis that gives a rider prehension to better grip reins. Having a simple carbon posterior leaf spring ankle foot orthosis for riding to aid in keeping the toes up in a patient with foot drop while remaining low profile is another great example. Disabled riders also benefit greatly having extras of activity-specific kinds as the wear and tear of hand and foot braces is much greater when sports are involved. Having access to activity specific orthoses such as these would be of great benefit in this sport of horsemanship and many others.
- You need only to look at the Special Olympics Maryland events to see the need for activity specific orthoses is a significant and worthwhile investment. Their words "INCLUSION, through sport, creating a world where opportunity is not limited by disability".
- We want to show our state delegates that HB 445 is necessary because orthosis users need access to physical activity beyond walking (and wheelchair users need more than everyday propulsion) to maintain function and prevent decline. In clinical practice, activity-specific orthoses are not a luxury—these devices are frequently the safest, most medically appropriate way for a patient to participate in prescribed therapy and maintain function. Physical activity is not optional for many of our patients; it is treatment. It encourages and preserves strength, balance, cardiovascular health, joint integrity, and independence they have gone through. When coverage is limited to a single “everyday” brace, patients are forced into unsafe workarounds: they stop participating in therapy-based activities, they compensate and overuse other joints, they experience increased falls or pain, and their overall health declines. Activity-specific orthoses allow clinicians to match the device to the demands of the activity—stability, positioning, range of motion, load management, and skin safety—so patients can safely participate in rehabilitation and the movement required to prevent secondary complications and avoidable downstream costs. In addition, access to activity-specific orthoses would impact patients by:

- Allowing safe participation in prescribed therapy activities (strength training, cycling, aquatic therapy, higher-level gait and balance training)
- Reducing falls and injury risk when activity demands change (speed, terrain, fatigue, water exposure, repetitive loading)
- Preventing overuse injuries and joint degeneration caused by compensatory movement patterns
- Improving endurance and cardiovascular health, which directly affects mobility and long-term independence
- Supporting return to work and essential life roles when tasks require more than basic ambulation
- Maintaining mental health and motivation by keeping patients engaged in meaningful, goal-driven rehabilitation

Marylanders need this legislation. These custom orthoses allow children and adults to play sports with their peers and live active, healthy lives. We have seen the artificial limitations imposed upon our patients simply due to a lack of access to these activity-specific devices. Our patients need this legislation. It is for the reasons stated above that we urge you to support HB0445.

Thank you for your consideration and your support,

Representatives from:

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 Hanger, Inc.
 Medical Center Orthotics & Prosthetics
 Medstar- MGSB
 Metro Prosthetics
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