

House Health Committee

February 25, 2026

Support for House Bill 965: OHCQ Stakeholder Advisory Council - Establishment

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) strongly supports House Bill 965 (HB965), which establishes a new Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ) Advisory Council. DRM, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, is Maryland's designated Protection and Advocacy agency with a federal mandate to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to ensure that individuals with disabilities can receive services that are free from harm, abuse, or coercion; and that are trauma-informed and recovery-oriented.

DRM meets regularly with OHCQ and files complaints on behalf of clients with disabilities who may be subject to abuse or neglect in health care facilities. DRM supports HB965 because OHCQ currently operates with minimal public oversight of its work. This can result in little recourse if an investigation does not address all issues raised in a complaint or, as often happens, a decision is not timely. For example, DRM is still waiting for OHCQ to complete investigations of four complaints that were submitted in 2021, including three complaints regarding the improper use of chemical restraint and one complaint in reference to alleged abuse of a patient by staff.

Added public accountability will make the OHCQ "plan of corrections" process more robust and effective. Advisory Council oversight would ensure that OHCQ holds facilities accountable with more meaningful corrective action plans. Especially when OHCQ investigations find dangerous conditions, facilities must be more closely monitored to ensure that the conditions are resolved. Without these changes, vulnerable patients will remain at risk.

DRM supports the requirements in HB965 that ensures a diversity of voices will be heard at the Advisory Council meetings. Having individuals with lived experience, including those who reside in nursing facilities, included in the process will help to ensure that facilities provide the quality care that individuals not only need, but also deserve.

Finally, DRM supports the sponsor's amendments, which will ensure that the Advisory Council can effectively monitor and advise OHCQ on all the facilities and programs that are under the agency's purview. For these reasons, DRM urges a favorable report on HB965.

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