



**Testimony in Support of HB178 with Amendments**

**Public Health – Sickle Cell Disease – Specialized Clinics & Medical Resident Scholarships**

**Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee:**

My name is Teanika Hoffman. I am a sickle cell warrior and advocate, and the Founder and Executive Director of the Sickle Cell Coalition of Maryland, Inc. I am here today in strong support of HB178, and I respectfully urge a favorable report with amendments.

Maryland is home to more than 5,000 sickle cell warriors, one of the largest sickle cell populations in the nation. Yet despite this reality, our health care infrastructure has not kept pace with the needs of this community, particularly for adults living with sickle cell disease.

HB178 directly addresses this gap. The bill requires the Maryland Department of Health to establish three specialized sickle cell clinics—in Montgomery County, Harford County, and on the Eastern Shore—using a hub-and-spoke model that expands access to trained providers through both in-person care and telehealth. This approach reduces geographic and racial disparities and relieves pressure on emergency departments.

Today, far too many sickle cell warriors rely on emergency rooms as their primary source of care. This is medically inappropriate and fiscally inefficient. Emergency-based care leads to delayed pain treatment, preventable hospitalizations, higher Medicaid costs, and irreversible complications such as stroke, organ damage, and shortened life expectancy.

Specialized clinics are proven to work. They reduce emergency department utilization, decrease inpatient admissions, improve pain control, and support longer, healthier lives. HB178 ensures these clinics provide routine and preventive care, pain management, mental health services, genetic counseling, patient education, and coordinated social supports—such as transportation, housing, and nutrition—which are critical drivers of health outcomes for people living with sickle cell disease.

HB178 also addresses Maryland's severe workforce shortage. Too few adult providers are trained to manage sickle cell disease. The bill creates a pathway to grow the workforce and retain providers in Maryland, recognizing that sustainable care depends on trained clinicians who understand the complexity of this disease.

Importantly, HB178 strengthens trusted community partners like the Sickle Cell Coalition of Maryland. The bill prioritizes collaboration with community-based and sickle cell-focused nonprofit organizations, allowing organizations like SCCM to expand outreach, provide education, support care coordination, and address social determinants of health. SCCM serves as a bridge between patients and providers, supports transitions from pediatric to adult care, and helps reduce avoidable hospital utilization—ensuring state investments translate into real-world outcomes.

From a fiscal perspective, this is a smart and accountable investment. The bill allocates \$6.138 million in FY 2028, prioritizing staffing, training, community partnerships, and measurable outcomes, while requiring annual reporting to the General Assembly on utilization, access, patient outcomes, and reductions in health disparities.

**Recommendation for Approval With Targeted Revisions**

1. Change “establish” to “fund” clinics, allowing Maryland to outsource RFA.
2. Strengthen requirements for community-based organizations by requiring funded organizations to be in-state and have at least three years of experience serving the sickle cell community.
3. Replace “medical resident” with “physician” to reflect the level of clinical expertise required for sickle cell care.
4. Allow funding for physicians broadly, rather than limiting eligibility to hematologists, recognizing the ongoing hematology workforce shortage.
5. Replace “scholarship” with “loan repayment assistance”, aligning with best practices for recruiting and retaining physicians in underserved areas.

With these targeted revisions, HB178 is smart public health policy for the more than 5,000 sickle cell warriors in our great State of Maryland, and it empowers trusted organizations like the Sickle Cell Coalition of Maryland to help deliver results.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB178. Lives truly depend on it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Teanika D. Hoffman, MA, CHW