



**Testimony in Support of HB 1133
Public Health – Drug Manufacturer-Funded Disease Awareness Campaigns –
Registration and Required Disclosure**

My name is Lydia Green. I trained as a pharmacist and started my career in medical advertising after finishing pharmacy school. I am the founder of RxBalance, a nonprofit organization that works to increase transparency and fairness in how medical information is shared with the public. I am here today to support HB 1133, which would require disclosure when pharmaceutical companies fund disease awareness campaigns.

I did not originally set out to work in pharmaceutical marketing. Like many pharmacists, I was interested in medicines and how they help people. In the late 1970s, I moved to New York and began working in pharmaceutical advertising. At that time, prescription drugs were promoted only to physicians.

Over time, that changed. Pharmaceutical companies began communicating not only with physicians but also directly with the public. I found myself developing educational content about medical conditions and treatments, as well as more promotional messaging.

Along the way, I worked on disease awareness programs for many different conditions — including hemophilia, depression, osteoporosis, and schizophrenia. Although the diseases were different, the strategy behind these campaigns was remarkably consistent. For one psychiatric medication, I led the creative development of the company's disease awareness program, creating educational content on schizophrenia and collaborating with a patient advocacy organization to distribute those materials and promote the company's new treatment through outreach to government health organizations and medical associations.

Before describing that system, I want to acknowledge the important work done by patient advocacy organizations. Early in my career, I worked with the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Groups like NAMI have done extraordinary work reducing stigma surrounding serious mental illness and helping families understand conditions like schizophrenia.

At the same time, it is important to understand the economic reality of pharmaceutical marketing. The purpose of drug marketing is ultimately to promote a treatment or expand the number of patients who receive it.

Disease awareness programs often play a role in that process. In some cases, educational materials are created directly by the pharmaceutical company. In other cases, the company provides funding to a patient advocacy organization or other third-party group that develops its own educational materials.

To the public, these programs can appear to be independent sources of health education. Inside the pharmaceutical industry, however, they are understood as part of the broader marketing strategy surrounding a disease and its treatment.

Pharmaceutical companies carefully evaluate the impact of every marketing investment. If a program does not contribute to commercial goals, it is discontinued. Companies analyze these efforts to determine whether they increase awareness of a condition, encourage treatment, and ultimately influence prescribing and product sales. Building relationships with influential patient advocacy groups is also a valued marketing activity.

A modern example can be seen in Alzheimer's disease awareness campaigns. Messaging from both pharmaceutical companies and a leading patient advocacy group might focus on educating people about a protein in the brain called beta-amyloid and the idea that removing it could slow cognitive decline. That same idea also provides the scientific basis for a new group of costly Alzheimer's drugs designed to eliminate amyloid from the brain. When people repeatedly hear this explanation, it naturally makes them ask their doctors about those treatments.

Within this system, disease awareness programs developed by patient advocacy organizations can be especially valuable because they carry credibility with patients and families. When educational messages come from a trusted advocacy organization rather than directly from a pharmaceutical company, they can feel more independent and therefore more persuasive.

This does not mean patient advocates are acting in bad faith. Many advocacy organizations do important work and sincerely believe they are helping patients and families.

But these programs still exist within a marketing system. Funding that appears to support education can also function as part of a company's broader marketing strategy.

HB 1133 does not prohibit disease awareness campaigns or limit the work of patient advocacy organizations. I see this bill primarily as a disclosure requirement. It simply asks that when pharmaceutical companies fund disease awareness programs, the relationship be visible to the public.

Disclosure is already a standard principle in medicine and science. Researchers disclose their funding sources. Drug companies disclose their financial relationships with physicians under federal law. Transparency helps people evaluate information in context.

Maryland residents make important health care decisions based on the medical information they receive. At the very least, they should know who is behind that information.