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WRITTEN TESTIMONY
HB1055 - Newborn Screening Program - Gaucher Disease
House Health Committee
March 4, 2026
Support

Background: HB1055 would require the Maryland Department of Health, as part of the newborn screening system, to screen for Gaucher disease. While Gaucher disease affects people of all ethnic backgrounds, it is especially common in the Ashkenazi Jewish population.¹

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all its agencies, and programs, as well as the organized Jewish Community of Baltimore.

Maryland's newborn screening program under the Department of Health tests for over 60 different disorders, including metabolic, endocrine, and hemoglobin conditions². A two-screen process is used, with samples collected shortly after birth and again around 10–14 days of age. The screening focuses on identifying rare, serious diseases early to allow for immediate treatment.

Gaucher disease is a genetic disorder more prevalent in people of Ashkenazi Jewish (Eastern European Jewish) descent, with about 1 in 10 carriers in this population, compared to 1 in 450 births affected, making it the most common Jewish genetic disease. It's caused by a deficiency in the [GBA enzyme](#), leading to fat buildup in organs, but carrier screening is vital for this community due to the high carrier rate.

An enzyme test called a beta-glucosidase leukocyte (BGL) test is the main tool that physicians use to diagnose Gaucher disease. This is because all patients with Gaucher disease will have low enzyme activity levels.³ This is a simple test that can be added to the already administered blood panel required by the Department of Health for newborns.

For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on HB1055.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.

¹ <https://www.gaucherdisease.org/about-gaucher-disease/jewish-genetic-diseases/>

² [Pages - NBS Disorders](#)

³ <https://www.gaucherdisease.org/gaucher-diagnosis-treatment/testing/>