



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 178 (HB178) – Public Health: Sickle Cell Disease Specialized Clinics and Scholarship Program. This legislation builds on a successful model, following the establishment of an adult sickle cell disease (SCD) center at Capital Region Medical Center in 2022 with the support of Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland. HB178 directs the Maryland Department of Health to expand this model by establishing three additional specialized SCD centers across the state, ensuring that patients receive comprehensive outpatient care closer to home. By expanding access to specialized treatment, this initiative will improve patient outcomes, reduce emergency room visits and hospital admissions, and lower overall Medicaid expenditures.

Sickle cell disease disproportionately impacts Black Marylanders, with 1 in 12 African Americans carrying the sickle cell trait and 1 in 365 diagnosed with the disease. Despite this, specialized SCD care has historically been concentrated in Baltimore City, even though only 30% of Maryland's SCD patients reside in Baltimore City or County. As a result, many Black Marylanders are forced to travel two or more hours for critical treatment. HB178 directly addresses this disparity by establishing three additional SCD centers in Montgomery County, Harford County, and a county on the Eastern Shore. These centers will provide routine medical care, pain management, mental health services, genetic counseling, and patient education, ensuring that Black Marylanders living with SCD receive consistent, high-quality care within their own communities. Additionally, the bill invests in Black healthcare professionals by creating a scholarship program for medical residents specializing in sickle cell care, increasing the number of trained providers equipped to serve Black communities.

By expanding access to life-saving SCD care and investing in a diverse healthcare workforce, HB178 is a critical step toward addressing systemic health disparities affecting Black Marylanders. The funding and infrastructure provided under this bill will not only improve the quality of life for individuals with SCD but also reduce the long-term financial burdens on families and the healthcare system.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports HB178.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland