

February 26, 2020

Chair, Senator Delores Kelley
Senate Committee on Finance
Maryland State Senate
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401



Honorable Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Committee,

The Association for Clinical Oncology (ASCO) is pleased to **support SB 952: Health Insurance – Requirement for Establishing Step Therapy Protocol and Requesting Exceptions**. ASCO is a national organization representing physicians who care for people with cancer. With nearly 45,000 members, our core mission is to ensure that cancer patients have meaningful access to high quality cancer care.

ASCO is committed to supporting policies that reduce cost while preserving quality of cancer care; however, it is critical that such policies be developed and implemented in a way that does not undermine patient access. Payer utilization management approaches like step therapy protocols are of particular concern because they represent greater likelihood of raising barriers to appropriate care for individuals with cancer.

Step therapy or fail first policies can be problematic for patients with cancer because they can severely delay a patient's access to the best treatment available for their condition. While waiting to complete a "step," a patient with cancer may experience disease progression and irreversible damage to their overall health. For patients with advanced cancer, a delay in care is a matter of life and death. For that reason, step therapy policies are generally inappropriate in oncology due to the individualized nature of modern cancer treatment and the general lack of interchangeable clinical options. With all of this in mind, **we are encouraged to see that SB 952 improves step therapy protocols in the state by:**

- **Enhancing clinical validity** by requiring insurers to incorporate evidence-based, peer-reviewed clinical guidelines into the development of their step therapy protocols;
- **Accommodating the needs of special patient populations** by requiring insurers to take atypical patient populations and diagnoses like cancer into account in their clinical review criteria;
- **Creating a step therapy exemption process** that is clear, convenient, and easily accessible; **and**
- **Ensuring timely access to care** by determining that a step therapy exemption request must be answered within 72 hours under normal circumstances and within 24 hours under exigent circumstances.

ASCO is encouraged by the steps that SB 952 takes toward improving step therapy protocols in Maryland. **We therefore urge the committee to pass the measure.** For a more detailed understanding of our policy recommendations on this issue, we invite you to read the [ASCO Position Statement: Utilization Management](#) by our affiliate, the American Society of Clinical Oncology. Please contact Allison Rollins at ASCO at allison.rollins@asco.org if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Monica Bertagnolli, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Monica Bertagnolli, MD, FACS, FASCO
Chair of the Board
Association for Clinical Oncology