



MARYLAND CITIZENS' HEALTH INITIATIVE

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TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HOUSE BILL 837

Before the Health and Government Operations Committee

By Amelia Marcus, Advocacy Fellow with the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, Inc.

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Madam Chair and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 837, which would work to reduce racial health outcome disparities within our health care system through the addition of a mandatory evidenced-based implicit bias training for health care practitioners in perinatal care units.

Thank you to Vice-chairwoman Peña-Melnyk and this committee for your diligence in ensuring that fair and equitable treatment within our health care system is a top priority, and that racial disparities in health outcomes in this State are earnestly addressed. Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative is committed to expanding not only access to health care, but also ensuring the quality of that care for all Marylanders.

A growing body of evidence shows the social and cultural forces that unconsciously create race-based implicit biases within individuals, affect how health care practitioners make decisions and deliver services, which contributes to the widening of racial health disparities in this country¹. Specifically when the maternal mortality rate for black women is more than three times higher than that for white women, and when socioeconomic status and access to comparable health care services do not explain the wide disparity², the issue demands serious attention. No one is immune to the unconscious development of implicit biases. Implicit bias training will help set up health care practitioners for success in providing quality care to all Marylanders.

The seriousness of the issue and its documented contribution to disparities in health outcomes requires the immediate attention of our State and health care practices in order to ensure that we are taking measurable steps to reverse this trend. We believe that HB837 takes an effective step at reducing the impact of implicit bias in health care delivery in Maryland. Thank you again to the committee for your recognized efforts toward improving access to quality, affordable health care for all Marylanders. We urge a favorable report from the Committee on House Bill 837.

¹Chapman E, Kaatz A, Carnes M. Physicians and Implicit Bias: How Doctors May Unwittingly Perpetuate Health Care Disparities. J Gen Intern Med. 2013; 28: 1504-10. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11606-013-2441-1>

²Center for Disease Control and Prevention. 2019. Racial and Ethnic Disparities Continue in Pregnancy-Related Deaths <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html>