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Testimony of Catherine Carter
SUPPORTING SB0172: Maryland Health Equity Resource Act
Wednesday, January 28, 2021

My name is Catherine Carter. I am a vision advocate who works on policy and legislative change to improve identification and access to vision care. I am also Project Manager of the Howard County "Beyond 20/20" Program is a collaborative public and private partnership that is working to bring awareness and needed eye care services to underserved/uninsured Howard County Public School System ("HCPSS") students. Distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today in favor of ensuring Marylanders have increased access to healthcare.

There are significant barriers to healthcare throughout Maryland, especially with vision care. None of 178 Maryland Federal Qualified Healthcare Centers FQHCs provide eye exams/glasses. One has purchased the equipment and is in the process of finding an optometrist. Nationwide "[w]hile dental services accounted for nearly 14% of total clinic visits in 2016, **eye care services accounted for only 0.77%**. This incongruity in health care professionals and utilization of services signals a substantial under-investment in resources for patients in need of vision care, the AOA HPI notes."

While managing the eye exam clinic, numerous parents also talked of their struggle to afford glasses, asking what resources were available to them. One single mom had an old pair of glasses that continuously broke; she couldn't afford to replace them. Marylanders on Medicare have told me of their struggle to afford glasses, resorting to the Dollar Store. Where are struggling Marylanders, who cannot afford vision care, to go if none of our Health clinics provide eye exams/glasses.

Maryland has led the nation in addressing the health disparities of its citizens. Through legislation you lowered our healthcare premiums, worked on lowering drug cost, the Maryland Consortium of Coordinated Community Supports in the Blueprint Bill to close the healthcare gap for students, and improved educational awareness in school vision and screening. You also enabled students with non-acuity vision disorders, like my son's double vision, to get access to needed vision accommodations and services, which led to a nationwide memorandum. You ensured protections for doctors who treat Lyme disease through integrative medicine. These changes took vision, innovation, and a resolve to right injustices.

Passing the Maryland Health Equity Resource Act will ensure better access to the healthcare. Committee oversight can target specific gaps in our current healthcare safety nets and ensure programs address those needs, such as the lack of vision care. I ask for a favorable vote on SB0172.

Beyond 20/20 Works to Help Kids See Clearer, Giving in Depth Eye Exams

<https://baltimore.cbslocal.com/2020/03/01/beyond-20-20-works-to-help-kids-see-clearer-giving-in-depth-eye-exams/>

Closing the Gap in Health Care Centers' Primary Eye Care

<https://www.aoa.org/news/inside-optometry/aoa-news/hpi-health-centers?sso=y>