



MedStar Health

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Pegeen Townsend
Vice President

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The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
241 House Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

Dear Chair Pendergrass:

On behalf of MedStar Health and MedStar Health Home Care, I want to share some concerns that the home health industry has around **SB 741 - COVID-19 Testing, Contract Tracing, and Vaccination Act of 2021**. SB 741 would, among other things, require home health agencies to set up COVID-19 testing for both the patients and visiting staff on a routine basis. MedStar Health Home Care has more than 400 employees and serves approximately 2,400 patients daily across the central Maryland region. While the home health industry understands and supports the concept of COVID-19 testing to reduce the spread of the virus and respects the intent of this bill, this provision is creating an unachievable expectation.

Home health agencies are already required to screen their employees daily prior to making home visits. If the employee is found to have symptoms, then an agency takes appropriate action. However, testing all employees and patients will not accomplish the desired outcome.

There are many variables to consider in a home care setting. First, there is no centralized location to conduct testing. Depending on the type of test, this would require logistical planning to get both a client and a staff person tested and await and track results. Agencies would need a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendment (CLIA) waiver to conduct the testing and not all home health agencies have this waiver. If the agency were to use a rapid test, they have found this test to be much less reliable than the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test. Further, this is a costly endeavor for which agencies have no reimbursement options in an environment where they are already struggling with the cost of personal protective equipment. This bill language only recommends but does not require funding for testing.

In addition, it is unclear why the home health industry is being individually selected to conduct this testing as the state is not requiring other care providers to conduct patient and staff testing. Home health patients often have other family members and other care providers entering the home. Patients also leave the home for reasons such as physician appointments. Because of this, it is doubtful that this routine testing would prove to reduce the spread of the virus.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the mandate for home health agencies to perform tests be removed from this bill.

Sincerely,

Pegeen A. Townsend

cc: Members, House HGO Committee
Erin Hopwood

It's how we treat people.

HGO 3-30-2021