

**Testimony on HB 463
Health Equity Resource Communities
Health and Government Operations
February 2, 2021**

Favorable

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the state's protection and advocacy system, mandated to advance the rights of people with disabilities. DRM supports HB 463 as a measure to address health care inequities among persons with disabilities, including persons of color.

Individuals with disabilities represent 18.7% of the U.S. population. A diagnosis of a disability does not define individuals, their talents and abilities, or health behaviors. However, individuals with disabilities do experience serious health disparities.

For example, adults with disabilities are three times more likely than adults without disabilities to have heart disease, stroke, diabetes or cancer. Multiple studies demonstrate that people of color and people with disabilities make-up a disproportionate share of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths. People with developmental disorders, as well as intellectual disabilities present with important risk factors for COVID-19 mortality, lung cancer, leukemia and lymphomas.

These disparities in health care outcomes stem from structural and systemic barriers across many sectors, influenced by racism and disability discrimination. Many of these same barriers result in people with disabilities living in poverty at a rate twice that of their non-disabled peers; and comprising a "chronically homeless" population, which is defined by our federal government as homeless persons who have chronic disabilities. Health disparities faced by people with disabilities include disparities in accessing health care for both acute needs and preventive care.

Consistent with the World Health Organization's model of social determinants of health, what defines health outcomes for individuals with disabilities most often depends on their community, social and environmental circumstances.

The Health Equity Resource Communities Act begins to address the barriers and inequities in a number of Maryland communities by offering services and resources. DRM applauds such efforts. If we have learned anything from the pandemic, it is that the health of all of us depends on the health of each of us.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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