



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

February 7, 2022

House Bill 6- Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults

Letter of Information

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, Delegate Cullison, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) wishes to provide this letter of information regarding HB 6 Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults.

MRHA supports efforts to eliminate barriers to health care and promote health equity, particularly for vulnerable populations. Improving access to dental care for low income adults is therefore a worthy goal and one that MRHA supports.

However, some members of our association urge caution regarding the state's current capacity to accommodate the increased demand for dental services this legislation would presumably create. The reimbursement structure of the program under consideration should be carefully developed so that this expansion is feasible and sustainable. Investments in healthcare workforce as well as public transportation and other infrastructure are necessary to ensure successful implementation of a proposal of this magnitude. MRHA suggests bill advocates consult with health departments and other existing dental clinics in rural areas in refining this proposal.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA thanks you for your careful consideration of this issue.

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