



MARYLAND CITIZENS' HEALTH INITIATIVE

2600 ST. PAUL STREET BALTIMORE, MD 21218

P: (410)235-9000

F: (410)235-8963

WWW.HEALTHCAREFORALL.COM

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 6

Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults

Before the House and Government Operations Committee

By Kathleen Hays, Intern, Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, Inc.

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Chairman Pendergrass and Members of the House and Government Operations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 6, which would expand dental coverage to adults at or below 133% of the federal poverty level. We especially thank Delegate Cullison for introducing this bill.

Thanks to the great work of the Maryland General Assembly, Maryland is one of the leading states for health care. However, we lag behind when it comes to dental coverage. Maryland is one of only three states that does not offer some level of dental care to adults enrolled in Medicaid. Dental care is crucial to the overall health and wellbeing of adults. Untreated oral health problems can lead to tooth loss and difficulty eating, which can result in nutrition issues.¹ Untreated oral health problems are also associated with other health issues such as oral and throat cancers, diabetes, stroke, heart and lung disease, poor birth outcomes, tooth decay, and periodontitis (chronic gum inflammation resulting in irreversible tooth and bone loss).^{1,2}

Furthermore, racial and ethnic disparities in untreated cavities make lack of dental coverage an issue of health equity.³ House Bill 6 would help Marylanders get the dental care that they desperately need.

Thank you again to the Committee for your recognized efforts toward improving access to quality, affordable health care for all Marylanders. This bill is crucial for Maryland to remain a leader in health care. We urge a favorable report from the Committee on House Bill 6.

¹ Hinton, E. & Paradise, J. (2016, March 17). *Access to Dental Care in Medicaid: Spotlight on Nonelderly Adults*. KFF. <https://www.kff.org/report-section/access-to-dental-care-in-medicaid-spotlight-on-nonelderly-adults-issue-brief>

² Lee, J.S. & Somerman, M.J. (2018). The Importance of Oral Health in Comprehensive Health Care. *JAMA*, 320(4), 339–340. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2017.19777>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). *Oral Health Surveillance Report: Trends in Dental Caries and Sealants, Tooth Retention, and Edentulism, United States, 1999–2004 to 2011–2016*. <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/OHSR-2019-index.html>