



CARE BRAVELY

HB596 – Health and Human Services Transportation Improvement Act of 2023

House Health and Government Operations Committee – February 28, 2023

Testimony of Martha D. Nathanson, Esq., Vice President, Government Relations and Community Development LifeBridge Health

Position: **SUPPORT**

I am writing in SUPPORT of HB596. LifeBridge Health is a regional health system comprising Sinai Hospital of Baltimore, an independent academic medical center; Levindale Geriatric Center and Hospital in Baltimore; Northwest Hospital, a community hospital in Baltimore County; Carroll Hospital, a sole community hospital in Carroll County, and; Grace Medical Center in Baltimore (formerly Bon Secours Hospital).

Access to reliable transportation is a common barrier to medical care. In our Community Health Needs Assessments, transportation was identified as a challenge, and as such contributes to longer hospital stays if a patient does not have access to transportation to their next level of care. Marylanders in rural areas with limited transportation also have difficulties getting to and from medical appointments.

This statewide challenge contributes to emergency department wait times as well. Patients may wait for transportation out of the hospital, and patients “stuck” in an inpatient bed can cause hospital backups. Additionally, lack of available nonemergency transport options means patients cannot get to critical appointments. This can delay care and lead to avoidable hospital visits and more expensive emergency

The bill identifies nonprofits that utilize volunteers to transport a targeted senior population. This limitation is a current barrier in at least one of our service areas, Carroll County, as only one such nonprofit would likely meet the criteria for funding under the program as proposed. While overall cost is certainly a limiting factor, we suggest that this issue be addressed at the County level during the Request for Proposal (RFP) process, or in regulation. In addition, the \$25 fee for program participants (per trip) may be prohibitive for some patients and thus impact utilization and ultimate success of the program’s main goal – to ensure patients can access the appropriate level of medical services in a timely manner. Finally, in a process that will likely be county-driven, assurances must be made for trips made across county lines and any mileage limitations that could impede access.

We strongly support HB596 as it will offer patients and hospitals another tool to help get patients home or to the next level of care as soon as they are cleared to do so. Hospitals are well-positioned to help coordinate transportation and work with community stakeholders to implement these programs and address this critical social determinant of health.

For all the above stated reasons, we request a **FAVORABLE** report for HB596.

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