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HB 23
Maryland Health Benefit Exchange – Qualified Health Plans – Dental Coverage
Hearing of the House Health & Government Operations Committee
January 25, 2024
1:00 PM

FAVORABLE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. Access to pediatric dental care has been an advocacy priority for us since one of our client's children, 12-year-old Deamonte Driver, died of an untreated tooth infection in 2007. Deamonte's death began a movement across the country that led to Medicaid covering comprehensive child dental care. **The PJC strongly supports HB 23** which would require all qualified health plans (QHPs) sold through the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE) to include pediatric dental benefits.

In the United States, cavities are the most common chronic childhood disease.¹ As a result of untreated cavities, children may experience issues with pain and infections which can impact important areas of their lives, including speaking, eating and learning.² However, this dental disease is preventable.³ Access to pediatric dental care is essential to preventing and treating childhood dental infections. HB 23 would codify the requirement for QHPs to provide pediatric dental coverage. It would also prohibit the participation of QHPs in the MHBE that lack this necessary coverage, thus upholding the State's commitment to meeting the oral health needs of children in Maryland.

¹ Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, *Children's Oral Health*, <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/basics/childrens-oral-health/index.html> (last visited January 25, 2024).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.

For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB 23**. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Woolard at 410-625-9409 x 224 or woolarda@publicjustice.org.