



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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Chairwoman Joseline Pena-Melnyk,
Health & Government Operation Cmte.
241 House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairwoman Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Committee:

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers strong favorable support for House Bill 340 - Prescription Drug Affordability Board - Authority for Upper Payment Limits and Funding (The Lowering Prescription Drug Costs For All Marylanders Now Act). **This bill is on the 2024 legislative priority agenda of the Black Caucus.**

This bill will expand the authority of the first in the nation Prescription Drug Affordability Board to allow for statewide upper payment limits. Currently, our Board is tasked with examining high-cost drugs and working to make them more affordable for our state and local government entities. The legislation will build upon this foundation, allowing the Board to determine fair, affordable rates for high-cost medications for all Maryland purchasers and payers.

Despite advancements in medical care and the gains made by the Affordable Care Act, glaring racial health inequities continue to persist in our country and state. Social, political, and economic conditions result in Black Americans being more likely to suffer from various diseases, with the unrelenting stressors of racism creating a higher risk for chronic conditions like hypertension and diabetes. While many of these conditions are manageable with medications, several factors including wage gaps and lack of insurance can make prescription drug costs disproportionately burdensome to Black Marylanders. Additionally, adverse tiering, where drugs that are used to treat diseases that happen to disproportionately and/or predominately affect communities of color are placed at higher tiers, frequently results in Black patients having higher cost-sharing expectations.

Today, Black Marylanders are reported to have no health insurance coverage twice as frequently as White, non-Hispanic residents. According to the Maryland BRFSS Brief, Black adults have the highest rates of hypertension. With evidence showing that medication adherence is closely linked with insurance coverage, it can be presumed that more Black Marylanders struggle to afford the hypertension medications they need. There are similar trends with diabetes. An estimated 45% of Marylanders have diabetes or prediabetes, with an overwhelming majority of these cases Type 2. Despite being largely preventable, Type 2 diabetes continues to have long term health impacts on our

residents and is a health issue with stark racial disparities. Currently, Black Americans are 60% more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes than White Americans, and they are more than twice as likely to suffer from complications such as vision impairment or end-stage renal disease. While there are systemic factors that contribute to this issue, such as food and medical deserts, the cost of diabetes maintenance medications is a major influence on health outcomes. People with diabetes already have medical expenses over two times higher than those without, but these costs may continue to soar as the United States pays significantly higher amounts for new diabetes medications coming to market compared to other countries.

This bill seeks to establish a Prescription Drug Affordability Board with full statewide upper payment limit authority, which is needed so that fair rates for high-cost drugs can be established for *all* Marylanders. If implemented, this legislation will not only alleviate some of the financial burden, but also work to improve health outcomes directly linked and detrimentally impacted by the soaring cost of medication. For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland supports House Bill 340 and asks that you vote favorably on this bill.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland