

Assembly passes law allowing minors access to HIV-preventative drug

Posted by [Alan Van Wormer](#) On 03/25/2019

Annapolis, MD - On March 25, the Maryland legislature acted to improve public health and disrupt Maryland's human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) rates by passing legislation that would allow doctors, nurse practitioners and physician assistants to prescribe a drug - pre-exposure prophylaxis, also known as "PrEP" - that helps prevent HIV to minors, without requiring parental consent. The House voted 109 to 21 in favor of the final bill (SB 251), sponsored by Senator Lam (District 12), which passed the Senate by a vote of 47 to 0 on March 13. The bill now goes to Governor Hogan for his signature.

Advocates say this bill will dramatically extend the lifespan of young black men, particularly those living in poverty. According to the Maryland Department of Health, about 74 percent of new diagnoses among youth were black.

"I treat teens who need the protection of PrEP to save their lives," said Dr. Raymona Smith, an 1199SEIU member. "Without this medicine, entire communities are at risk for an increased incidence of HIV disease. As a provider, when I must inform an adolescent that he or she is HIV positive, it's a sleepless night for me, and I can't imagine the impact on them."

PrEP consists of a single pill called Truvada taken every day. Truvada can reduce the risk of becoming infected with HIV from sex by 90 percent and among intravenous drug users by 70 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

On average, three people are diagnosed with HIV in Maryland every day. According to the CDC, Maryland has the second highest lifetime risk of HIV infection.

Advocates believe the legislation will help young people who want the drug but don't feel comfortable discussing sexual activity with their parents.

"While working as a therapist at Chase Brexton for over five years, I have witnessed the emotional impact on a young person who is newly diagnosed with HIV and the stigmas that often come with it," said Stacey Jackson-Roberts, 1199SEIU member who is a therapist and clinical social worker. "I have also seen the significant difficulty that many young people face in accessing preventative care, particularly having conversations with their parents or guardians about their sexual health. It is ideal that these conversations occur before HIV prevention medication is prescribed, but either way, social workers like me would still strive to do it after the fact. Protecting patients' lives is most urgent, followed by fostering a strong support network of family and mentors."

It is estimated that more than 50 percent of youth living with HIV in Maryland remain undiagnosed, which dramatically increases their risk of infecting others.

Maryland will join 17 other states who have passed similar legislation.

Last week, the House of Delegates voted 123-13 in favor of the House version of the bill, HB 1183 sponsored by Delegate Hill (District 12).

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