



May 10, 2024

Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board  
16900 Science Drive  
Suite 112-114 Bowie, MD 20715

*Re: Statement of Michael Elizabeth, Public Health Policy Strategist, Equality Federation - Submitted for Public Comment: Maryland PDAB Meeting - May 20, 2024*

Dear members of the Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board,

My name is Michael Elizabeth (they/them), and I serve as Public Health Policy Strategist with the Equality Federation. We support our member organization in Maryland, FreeState Justice. FreeState Justice (FSJ) is Maryland's leading legal nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of the state's over 234,000 LGBTQ+ residents.

Equality Federation is an advocacy accelerator working to achieve full equality for LGBTQ+ communities. A key component of this work is enhancing public health and HIV advocacy for communities impacted by HIV.

We have observed with concern that Biktarvy is included on Attachment A of the March 25, 2024 MD PDAB meeting materials for Preliminary Identification of Potential Drugs for Referral to the Stakeholder Council. FreeState Justice and Equality Federation join the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs in strongly urging the Maryland PDAB to conduct a thorough assessment considering social and structural determinants of health before evaluating any HIV medication. This assessment should meaningfully engage Marylanders living with HIV to ensure efforts to end the HIV epidemic are successful.

Limiting treatment options and increasing the complexity of accessing life-saving HIV medication will negatively impact people living with HIV. This is especially harmful to LGBTQ+ individuals, who already face significant marginalization and barriers to healthcare. Complex HIV treatment regimens necessitate that patients and providers work in close partnership to determine optimal medication choices and achieve positive health outcomes.

People living with HIV need access to the medications prescribed to them.

Different HIV medications are not easily interchangeable. To ensure the benefits of advancements in HIV treatment, patients must be able to start, stay, or switch to the HIV treatment regimen deemed most appropriate for them, always in consultation with their healthcare provider. Any policy that restricts access to these medications or disrupts treatment for stable patients could lead to poor medication adherence, impede viral suppression, harm patient health, and even increase the risk of new HIV transmissions.

Equality Federation and FreeState Justice are eager to collaborate with the Maryland PDAB to ensure access to affordable, life-saving HIV treatment and prevention drugs without unintended negative consequences. We share the PDAB's goal of making essential treatments accessible to Marylanders and would welcome an opportunity to work together for the benefit of those living with HIV and their healthcare providers.

Sincerely,

Michael Elizabeth  
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Equality Federation  
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