



## MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Consumers Need Skilled Navigators in Health Care Reform

**Baltimore, MD** – On Wednesday, January 25, 2012 at 1:00 P.M., a group of local health officials and advocates will come together to testify in the Maryland General Assembly about the challenges and opportunities related to reaching out to the uninsured. The group expected to testify includes Dr. Peter Beilenson, Howard County Health Officer, Dr. Uma Ahluwalia, Director of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, and Kathleen Westcoat, President of Health Care Access of Maryland, Inc.

Their testimony will be part of a full hearing in front of the Health and Government Operations Committee of the House of Delegates focused on Maryland's Health Benefit Exchange and the current state and future directions related to implementing federal health care reform in the state. Specific additional topics on the hearing agenda include a report on the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange and views from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene on the establishment of a basic health plan on Maryland's Health Benefit Exchange.

Maryland has taken a leading role in the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) among U.S. states. Reports on the progress and legislation that will drive the establishment of the statewide health benefit exchange are a key focus for legislators and advocates in the 2012 session of the Maryland General Assembly.

Kathleen Westcoat, President of Health Care Access Maryland, a not-for-profit organization based in Baltimore that provides a variety of specialized services for the residents of Maryland in the areas of eligibility, enrollment, navigation, care coordination and education/advocacy says "HealthCare Access and other similar organizations serve a critical role as health system navigators. We welcome the opportunity to work together with our partner organizations and Maryland's legislators on the creation of an Exchange that will provide a seamless entry for Maryland consumers into affordable and comprehensive health insurance."

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Dr. Peter Beilenson, Howard County Health Officer, says that "A robust investment in the Navigator Program will maximize the benefits of health care reform in Maryland communities. It is important to build on the existing capacity of local health departments and other agencies to enroll individuals and families in health care programs. Marylanders need navigator organizations that can deliver quality, coordinated, and consumer-friendly services right from the start."

"Implementation of the recommendations of the Exchange Board around eligibility to and navigation within the Health Insurance Exchange will require creative workforce strategies and a capacity to serve both Medicaid and non-Medicaid populations seamlessly," said Uma Ahluwalia, Director of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services. "Montgomery County is excited about this endeavor and is planning for these changes in a proactive way."

The hearing location will be held in Room 240 in the House Office Building.

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