



**Testimony:
Armstead Hetherington
Client, Health Care for the Homeless**

before the

Maryland House of Delegates: House and Government Operations Committee

on

**SB 284: Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults –
Pilot Program**

April 3, 2018
Room 240, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland

My name is Armstead Hetherington and I am a client and advocate at Health Care for the Homeless.

When I came to Health Care for the Homeless in Baltimore nine years ago, I was experiencing homelessness, struggling with substance use, suffering from diabetes and heart problems and missing all of my front teeth.

I didn't even know how to begin to pick up the pieces to my life. I couldn't eat right, and I was always in pain. I didn't want to smile or even open my mouth around people it was so embarrassing.

But within months of seeing care providers at Health Care for the Homeless, I had a new heart defibrillator and was regularly seeing a therapist. And in 2014, I got housing. But it wasn't until I received partial dentures in spring 2015 that everything really changed.

Dental care gave me my confidence back, and when you get your confidence back, you can move forward. Everyone was surprised when they saw me for the first time with teeth. 'Wow—you're handsome', they said. It changed the way you think about yourself and present yourself to others.

My new teeth gave me a boost of confidence that I never had before. I wanted to be around people again and be an active member of society. Not long after getting dental care, I got clean and started attending local advocacy groups. Now, I sit on the consumer relations committee at Health Care for the Homeless and volunteer regularly to help others get back on their feet. In 2016, I ran a voter registration desk when Maryland restored the right to vote for individuals with felony records. I even reconnected with my sister, after be apart from my family for decades.

Now, as an advocate, I fight for the health and well-being of my friends, neighbors and community members. And on a daily basis, I see these people struggling with dental care. When I got my dentures, everyone asked where they could go to get dental care, too. For so long, they thought dental care just was not possible for them. I heard so many stories of people who were struggling without teeth, in pain and too embarrassed to work, or just meet with their friends.

Health Care for the Homeless has helped me tremendously, but their dental care isn't reimbursable through Medicaid or insurance. But with this bill, more adults like me will get the dental care they need to return to a normal, healthy and life. Please support SB 284. Thank you.

Armstead Hetherington

Client, Health Care for the Homeless

