



Testimony of
Gregory Rogers
Community Health Worker
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before the

Maryland Senate: Committee on Finance

on

**SB 0163: Public Health – Community Health Workers – Advisory Committee and
Certification**

February 1, 2018
Annapolis, Maryland

Good afternoon Mister Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Gregory Rogers, and I am a Community Health Worker at Health Care for the Homeless in Baltimore. I am here to speak in support of SB 0163 to establish the State Community Health Worker Advisory Committee. As a Community Health Worker, I see how this bill positions me to support our most vulnerable community members.

Mr. James is a client who has experienced homelessness for eleven years. If you've ever driven past the corner of Baltimore and Gay St. near Baltimore City's Police Department, you might have seen him sleeping on the street. Mr. James has a wheelchair because his left leg was amputated after being hit by a car a few years back, and his right leg is in severe need of wound care.

Mr. James has experienced a lot of trauma, both leading up to his experience of homelessness and for the past eleven years. He has complex behavioral and medical health challenges stemming from a history of violence, and for much of his life, he's experienced chronic pain. If you pick any single issue Mr. James is grappling with—heart disease, blindness in one eye, depression, seizures—it can seem impossible for a single person to manage. Imagine having all of these issues at once and while living on the street. For a long time, Mr. James' approach was ignoring all of these challenges until they were unavoidable. Our outreach team first tried to connect with him in 2015, but they were met with resistance. My job is to connect with him in a way that I can bridge his distrust of providers and make sure he can reach stability.

To do that, I meet him where he is. I share a lot of my own experiences with him—my past, my knowledge of the city, my challenges—so that I can talk to him about the range of options that exist to treat him as a whole person. I can talk to him about the services, because I know how helpful they can be—I've been on both sides of the role. I can recommend the services from my own experiences using them toward my own stability.

When I'm with Mr. James, or anyone like him, I acknowledge the trauma he's experienced; I have to understand the nuances of his situation and how people just get stuck. Experiencing homelessness is stressful—it can make you feel unsafe, isolated, and disempowered. When you've experienced so much, you can hit a wall in your care, and you don't know how to move forward. Community Health Workers meet people when they're stuck, and we work together to break through that wall.

After months of relationship building with Mr. James, we're starting to find a path forward. This week, he agreed to come back to our clinic to receive wound care, and he's just started staying at the shelter up the road.

I support SB 0163 because it would ensure that I'm able to do my job as a Community Health Worker to support Mr. James. Mr. James deserves to feel safe and healthy, just like me and everyone else before me today. I appreciate your support and careful consideration of this issue. Thank you for your valuable time and consideration.