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Maryland General Assembly
House of Delegates Health Committee
90 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony in Favor of HB 1133, Public Health - Drug Manufacturer-Funded Disease Awareness Campaigns - Registration and Required Disclosure

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1133. I am Megan Whiteman, a researcher with Public Citizen's Access to Medicines Program and a Maryland resident. Public Citizen is a nonprofit consumer advocacy organization with more than one million members and supporters throughout the U.S., including many members in Maryland. Public Citizen's Access to Medicines Program works with partners across the U.S. and around the world to make medicines available for all through tools in policy and law.

We support Maryland's proposal to reveal industry support regarding disease awareness campaigns.

Patient groups can lend credibility to industry priorities. If patient groups have been paid to support those priorities, that may influence the positions they choose to prioritize and support, and should be disclosed so that members of the public can make informed judgments about the information they receive.

Recent Public Citizen research found that, among groups that lobbied the federal government on three bills that would limit the government's ability to negotiate much-needed lower drug prices for Medicare, all entities, including all patient groups, that were supportive of the three harmful bills had ties to the industry.¹ This included groups that received industry funding. Another Public Citizen analysis found that among patient groups that signed a letter of support for one of these bills, at least 74% had direct financial or partnership relationships with prescription drug corporations and 87% were funded by or affiliated with corporate interests.² When combining signatories that are divisions of the same organization, 93% were funded by or affiliated with corporate interests.³

Similarly, industry-sponsored disease awareness campaigns are often used to support industry interests in promoting specific products, rather than to support public health and patient interests. For example, a 2021 campaign aimed at educating the public about Mild Cognitive Impairment was launched about a month before the campaign sponsor's Alzheimer's disease treatment was approved by the FDA.⁴ The campaign was designed to prompt people to get cognitive screenings and effectively acted as a strategy

¹ https://www.citizen.org/wp-content/uploads/Hundreds-of-Lobbyists-Hired-to-Undermine-Drug-Price-Negotiations_11.2025.pdf

² <https://www.citizen.org/news/patient-groups-with-deep-ties-to-big-pharma-petition-to-undermine-medicare-drug-price-negotiations/>

³ *Id.*

⁴ <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2021/07/16/do-we-all-have-alzheimers-drug-makers-might-want-you-to-think-so-commentary/>; <https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/biogen-pushes-for-early-alzheimer-s-detection-latest-ad-campaign-as-hospitals-reject-aduhelm>

to support use of aducanumab, an Alzheimer's treatment that was exorbitantly expensive, was approved despite a lack of evidence that the drug provided any meaningful clinical benefit and the fact that the drug had a well-documented risk of potentially serious brain injury, and was ultimately pulled from the market.⁵

When industry sponsorship undergirds disease awareness campaigns, it is reasonable to require transparency regarding the role of industry support. Maryland residents deserve to be well informed on this matter.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1133.

⁵ <https://www.citizen.org/wp-content/uploads/2556.pdf>;
<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/31/business/biogen-alzheimers-aduhelm.html>