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January 14, 2013

Delegate Robert D. Orrock, Sr.
Chairman
Health, Welfare and Institutions Committee
General Assembly Building, Room 411
Capitol Square
Richmond, Virginia 23219

RE: **HB 1422 – *Support***

Dear Chairman Orrock:

I am writing you today on behalf of the Global Healthy Living Foundation (GHLF) and the more than 56,000 members we represent to express our support for HB 1422. We represent patients living with chronic illnesses nationwide, from those with osteoporosis to those with chronic mental illness. Many of the patients we represent, including the nearly 30,000 with Rheumatoid Arthritis, take biologics.

At the GHLF, our focus is on improving the lives of patients with chronic illnesses through health care education and mobilization programs that stress the importance of diagnosis, early and innovative medical intervention, long-term lifestyle improvement and therapeutic compliance. Using various channels of influence, we work to communicate and leverage new and improved medical treatments, such as biologics, to patients. As promising as these innovative drugs are, GHLF believes that assuring their safety should be of paramount concern.

We believe that HB 1422 takes positive steps toward updating Virginia law to cover biologics and biosimilars in a way that protects patients. Unlike traditional chemical drugs, biologics have very unique, complex structures made from living cells that are not easily understood or replicated. A small change or difference in the biosimilar or biologic has the potential to either help or adversely affect the patient.

There are two provisions in HB 1422 that GHLF believes are key to ensuring patients' safety and needs are met in the best way possible. First, the bill requires a pharmacist dispensing an interchangeable biosimilar to notify the prescribing physician and the patient. Second, the pharmacist must also record the brand or product name and the name of the manufacturer of the biosimilar on the record of dispensing and the prescription label.

For patients, these two provisions are crucial. A determination of product interchangeability could take the decision-making process out of the hands of patients and doctors and put it into the hands of the pharmacists or insurers through states' automatic substitution policies. We believe that the choice of product should be decided only by patients and physicians, who are ultimately responsible for patient care and have the full spectrum of a patient's medical history. In addition, if it is determined by the doctor and patient that a biosimilar is indeed interchangeable in a particular case, it is important that proper record keeping be in place in order to track any adverse events that may occur.

As patient advocates, it is our duty to ensure that patients and physicians are in charge of the drugs prescribed, that patient safety is the top priority in the health care process and that medical decisions remain between a doctor and his or her patient. We urge the passage of HB 1422 because it introduces biosimilars in a way that ensures the safety of patients and preserves the physician-patient relationship.

We appreciate your thoughtful consideration this legislation and would be pleased to provide any further information that you may require.

Sincerely,

Seth Ginsberg
President, Global Health Living Foundation

CC: Health, Welfare and Institutions Committee Members

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