



June 22, 2021

The Honorable John DiSanto
Chair
Senate Banking and Insurance Committee
168 Main Capitol
Senate Box 203015
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Re: Support for Senate Bill 225-Preauthorization and Step Therapy Reform

Dear Chairman DiSanto and Members of the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee:

On behalf of the 1-in-10 individuals living in Pennsylvania with one of the approximately 7,000 known rare diseases, the National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD) thanks you for adding Senate Bill 225 (SB 225) to the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee's next meeting agenda. SB 225 would ensure that when step therapy and prior authorization is used in Pennsylvania, it is safe for patients, clinically grounded, and transparent to patients and health care providers.

NORD is a unique federation of voluntary health organizations dedicated to helping people with rare "orphan" diseases and assisting the organizations that serve them. We are committed to the identification, treatment, and cure of rare disorders through programs of education, advocacy, research, and patient services. NORD believes strongly that all patients deserve the medical care that is best suited for their medical situation and will give them the best results.

Step therapy policies, also known as fail first, are used in an attempt to control costs by forcing patients to try and "fail first" on an alternative medication before accessing the medication that was originally prescribed to them by their provider. This process of prolonging ineffective treatment and delaying access to the right treatment – especially for patients living with serious or chronic illnesses – can lead to medical setbacks, disease progression, and even hospitalizations which can ultimately lead to increases in health care costs. Furthermore, the prior authorization process often requires patients to wait days, or even weeks, before learning if their treatment is approved which can be dangerous for patients with rare diseases.

Therefore, we ask you to support SB 225, which would allow patients better access to the most appropriate treatments prescribed by their healthcare providers and would create a quicker and more efficient prior authorization system. This would be accomplished by:

- Ensuring that step therapy protocols are based on widely accepted medical and clinical practice guidelines;
- Creating a clear and expeditious process to request a medical exception and requiring a response by the patient's health plan within 72 hours for non-emergency and 24 hours for emergency situations;



- Providing certain circumstances for a patient to override the step therapy protocol when the drug required under the step therapy protocol is contraindicated or will likely cause an adverse reaction of physical or mental harm;
- Establishing a minimum approval duration period to expedite the prior authorization process.

It is important to note that SB 225 does not ban the use of step therapy or prior authorization. SB 225 would protect patients while still enabling health plans to achieve the cost saving benefits of these practices, when appropriate. It is important to reform the state's step therapy and prior authorization processes to avoid some of the unnecessary burdens on patients, providers and the health care system that could be prevented with appropriate and timely care.

On behalf of the Pennsylvania rare disease community, we thank you for adding SB 225 to your Committee's agenda and urge its swift passage. For any questions, please reach out to Annissa Reed at AReed@rarediseases.org. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Heidi Ross
Director of Policy
National Organization for Rare Disorders

Annissa Reed
State Policy Manager, Eastern Region
National Organization for Rare Disorders

CC: Members of the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee