

Senator Virginia Lyons, Chair
Senator Ruth Hardy, Vice Chair
Senator Ann Cummings
Senator Cheryl Hooker
Senator Joshua Terenzini

February 19, 2021

Dear Members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee,

Blue Cross strongly supports S.22, an act relating to health care practitioners administering stem cell products not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Providing patients with information that helps them to make informed choices about their health care is vital, especially with these types of practitioners and treatments that prey on sick, desperate patients.

FDA-approved stem cell therapies such as cord blood transplants can save lives, but as you've heard in testimony some of these unapproved stem cell therapy treatments are at best unproductive and at worst, simply dangerous. [The FDA itself has warnings about these therapies.](#) This is the darkest side of our health care system.

Stem cell treatments require prior authorization by Blue Cross before the treatment is covered by health insurance, and we only cover stem cell treatments that are FDA-approved. We receive many prior authorization requests for these alternative therapies, and members are often disappointed and angry when these non-FDA-approved treatments are denied. The prior authorization process is one means of communicating to patients that these treatments are not therapeutic, but some still choose to pursue these treatments independently and pay for them directly. The prior authorization process protects patients and provides information, allows them to consider their options, and get a second opinion. Requiring the providers of these unapproved therapies to notify their potential patients of the lack of rigorous oversight may help people to understand the questionable efficacy of these procedures.

As Dr. Daniel Weiss said in his testimony, there are no justifiable uses of Mesenchymal Stem (Stromal) Cells. These practitioners take advantage people with debilitating pain or other conditions with few hopeful options. Blue Cross encourages support of S.22 requiring notice to patients, advertising disclosures, and other consumer protections.

Sincerely,

Sara Teachout
Corporate Director, Government and Media Relations