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The Honorable Bauer-Kahan, Chair

California State Assembly Committee on Privacy and Consumer Protection
Capitol Office, 1021 O Street, Suite 5210 Sacramento, CA 95814

Position Letter: SB 503 (Weber Pierson) - Support if Amended

Dear Chairwoman Kahan and Members of the California State Assembly Committee on Privacy and Consumer Protection,

Students for Patient Advocacy Nationwide (SPAN) supports the idea of SB 503, which aims to promote fairness, transparency, and accountability in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in health care. We recognize the importance of legislation that confronts the intersection of AI and healthcare, which has become more and more important to address in recent times. A study using the **HOUSESES socioeconomic (SES) index** showed that asthma-predicting **AI models have a higher balanced error rate for low-SES patients** than for others, meaning these AI tools are **less accurate for low-SES patients, increasing risk of harm or missed care**. The research also found missing or incomplete EHR data among lower-SES patients. Clearly biases within AI, specifically in terms of healthcare is something legislators must address. **SB 503 represents a crucial step forward for the future of California's AI healthcare legislation.**

However, after careful review of the bill's text in its current form, we respectfully request a specific addition that would strengthen the bill's impact and ensure it fully serves the communities it intends to protect.

We are particularly concerned about the lack of protections based on socioeconomic factors. **Section 1 (a)(2) of SB 503**, states "For each patient care decision support tool, developers and deployers shall make reasonable efforts to mitigate the risk of discrimination **on the basis of a protected characteristic** resulting from the tool's use in its health programs or activities." The bill's definition of 'protected characteristic' does **not** include socioeconomic factors. As noted above, **low-SES patients face greater AI-related healthcare risks**. Without clear protections, the bill risks perpetuating socioeconomic discrimination, undermining its intent to reduce biases in AI healthcare applications.

To address these concerns, we provide the following Amendment Proposal:

We propose amending **Section 1(a)(2) and adding Section 1(a)(11)** to expand protections to all Californians that require them.

For example:

Add: “or socioeconomic factors” immediately after **“on the basis of a protected characteristic”** in **Section 1 (a)(2)**

Add a new provision: Section 1 (a)(11) that states **“for the purpose of this bill socioeconomic status, includes but is not limited to ZIP code, insurance type, housing status, education level, or employment status.”**

SB 503 appropriately focuses on bias related to protected characteristics defined in Civil Code §51(b), but it excludes patients impacted by socioeconomic inequity. Many AI tools rely on inputs like **ZIP code or insurance type** that function as proxies for income or neighborhood inequality, which can lead to biased care decisions even without violating civil rights statutes. Adding this amendment ensures SB 503 protects patients from explicit discrimination **and** the more common harms caused by algorithmic bias.

We believe these changes will help ensure California remains a leader and example for the entire nation, while also protecting its citizens from discrimination. SPAN is proud to Support SB 503 **IF** it is amended to reflect the true intent of the bill. We respectfully urge the committee to consider this change before moving the bill forward. We are happy to provide additional input or support as needed.

Sincerely,



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HS Ambassador, SPAN



Vishank Panchbhavi
Collegiate Ambassador, SPAN



Joel Blessan
Policy research Director, SPAN