



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

February 4, 2020

Senate Bill 329 – Public Institutions of Higher Education – Outbreak Response Plan

POSITION: SUPPORT

Senators Waldstreicher and Rosapepe, Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 329 – Public Institutions of Higher Education – Outbreak Response Plan.

This legislation would require a public institution of higher education to submit an outbreak response plan to the Maryland Department of Health on or before August 1 each year, beginning in 2021, and to implement the outbreak response plan under certain circumstances; requiring the outbreak response plan to include certain protocols and processes and the provision of certain staff; requiring the Department, in consultation with the Maryland Higher Education Commission, to adopt certain regulations; etc.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

Maryland law states that "many rural communities in the State face a host of difficult challenges relating to persistent unemployment, poverty, changing technological and economic conditions, an aging population and an out-migration of youth, inadequate access to quality housing, health care and other services, and deteriorating or inadequate transportation, communications, sanitations, and economic development infrastructure." (West's Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b)

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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