



Mission: *To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy*

Vision: *Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities*

HB1528 – Maryland Council on Health in All Policies - Establishment

Hearing Date: March 11, 2020

Committee: Health and Government Operations

Position: SUPPORT

We are writing to express support for HB 1528, which establishes the Maryland Council on Health in All Policies, based out of recommendations from the workgroup that studied Maryland’s population to make suggestions to state and local governments about laws and policies that would promote the health of residents. HB 1528 requires diverse membership, which will ensure a multifaceted approach in promoting the health of *all* Marylanders.

The American Public Health Association (APHA) has named health equity a guiding priority and core value. In their informational guide about Health in All Policies, APHA states, “the environments in which people live, work, learn, and play have a tremendous impact on their health.” Accordingly, we must take an interdisciplinary approach to improving health; “public health agencies and organizations need to work with those who are best positioned to create policies and practices that promote healthy communities and environments.” HB 1528 allows this policy change to happen by collecting diverse information about the health of various Maryland communities that can then be used to effectively communicate with state and local government.

The Maryland Public Health Association prioritizes policies that address health equity, which ensures everyone has the opportunity to attain their highest level of health. Healthy People 2020, the nation’s health objectives for the past decade, defined health equity as the “attainment of the highest level of health for all people. Achieving health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices, and the elimination of health and health care disparities.” Health in all policies is an important strategy used to achieve health equity.

There are health inequalities among neighborhoods and counties in our state, which stem from the social determinants outlined by APHA. For example, infant mortality rates are significantly higher in Baltimore City, Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince George’s County when compared to the rest of the state.² Similarly, Baltimore City and Prince George’s County show significantly higher rates than the rest of Maryland, among all children born with a low birth weight. This is a highly preventable birth outcome that has been linked to lower test scores in school as well as poor physical health later in life. The workgroup established in HB 1528 would be able to tackle issues like this in Maryland and make suggestions to policy makers about how to reduce, and ultimately end, these disparities. Importantly, the workgroup would look at sectors that are not always linked to health – i.e. access to transportation, promotion in the workplace, and environmental factors.

The World Health Organization (WHO) often talks about how we need to look at health through the “Life Course Approach.” This approach is a “temporal and social perspective” and “considers the long term health consequences of biological and social experiences,” which is

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what this workgroup is attempting to accomplish in Maryland. We know that the social determinants of health need to be explored and addressed, and this workgroup will be able to do so with the passing of this bill. We thank Delegate Robbyn Lewis for sponsoring this bill and strongly support HB 1528.

MdPHA is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education efforts and advocacy of public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 150-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.