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HB 1663

March 11, 2020

TO: Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Nicholas Blendy, Deputy Director of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 1663 - State of Emergency and Catastrophic Health Emergency
- Authority of Governor (COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Protection
Act of 2020)

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Peña-Melnyk, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 1663.

BCA fully supports all of the measures that this bill will authorize the Governor to take, including prohibiting cost-sharing by carriers for disease testing, ordering the Maryland Department of Health to cover the cost of disease testing for those who would otherwise not be covered by a carrier or another third party, requiring carriers and the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to cover the cost of an immunization and any associated costs if the immunization will prevent the disease that the basis of the issuance of the proclamation, and prohibiting retailers from increasing the sale or rental price of any good or service to a price that increases the retailers value of profit by more than 10% for items like food, fuel, and medicine. These measures are critical for the prevention and treatment of a disease like COVID-19.

The citizens of Maryland must be able to seek disease testing and immunization without the fear of any associated cost. In Baltimore City, specifically, 8.2% of citizens under 65 do not have health insurance and 21.8% of the population is in poverty, with both factors acting as barriers to testing and immunization due to added costs and further

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contributing to the spread of COVID-19.¹² For these same reasons, essential supplies must remain affordable to the citizens of Maryland. If prices increase substantially, it will limit the ability of Baltimore City residents to acquire said goods.³ This could result in greater morbidity and mortality, as well as a decrease in quality of life.⁴

As COVID-19 spreads throughout our communities, the BCA fully supports expanding the state's short-term ability to more comprehensively promote the public health of Maryland residents. The BCA is also looking forward to taking part in the state's response as we believe a collaborative approach will result in better health outcomes.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on House Bill 1663.

¹*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Baltimore City, Maryland.*

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/baltimorecitymaryland>. Accessed 10 Mar. 2020.

² Coombs, Bertha. "Private Labs Start Testing for Coronavirus, Prompting Concerns about Cost and Insurance Co-Pays." *CNBC*, 6 Mar. 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/06/private-labs-start-testing-for-coronavirus-prompting-cost-concerns.html>.

³ *Greater Impact: How Disasters Affect People of Low Socioeconomic Status*. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, July 2017, p. 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*