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**SB 0298**

February 8, 2022

**TO:** Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

**FROM:** Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations

**RE:** Senate Bill 0298 – Criminal Law - Threat Against Public Health Official or Hospital Staff Member

**POSITION: Support**

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate (SB) 0298.

SB 0298 prohibits a person from making or sending a threat to a public health official or hospital staff member with the intent to intimidate, interfere with, or impede a public health official or hospital staff member from performing official duties.

COVID-19 has placed an unprecedented burden on the local public health workforce. With challenges in funding and staffing, the weight of managing the pandemic and protecting local communities has been monumental. The Baltimore City Health Department is one of the first lines of defense and protection against COVID-19. As an agency, we provide testing, vaccination, contact tracing, and public education to Baltimore City residents. However, aside from disease monitoring and surveillance to enforcing mitigation measures against the virus, the well-being of the public health workforce has been threatened as well.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, public health officials across the country have experienced increased levels of harassment, threats, and attacks from the public. This is taking a toll on the protections public health officials provide to the public. Our colleagues at the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) have noted that since the pandemic began, at least 300, and potentially 500, public health department leaders have left their posts, impacting 20% of Americans.<sup>i ii iii</sup> Of note, many threats include misogynistic and racist undertones.<sup>iv</sup>

The stress and strain of the pandemic is threatening leadership and workforce shortages – some from abuse and threats. The health and protection of our residents requires the health and protection of our public health officials charged with this very important task.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 0298.

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<sup>i</sup> Weber L, Barry-Jester AM. Over Half of States Have Rolled Back Public Health Powers in Pandemic. (2021)  
Retrieved from <https://khn.org/news/article/over-half-of-states-have-rolled-back-public-health-powers-in-pandemic/>

<sup>ii</sup> Baker, Mike, Ivory, Danielle. Threats, Resignations and 100 New Laws: Why Public Health Is in Crisis. (2021)  
Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/18/us/coronavirus-public-health.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Baker, Mike, Ivory, Danielle. Threats, Resignations and 100 New Laws: Why Public Health Is in Crisis. (2021)  
Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/18/us/coronavirus-public-health.html>

<sup>iv</sup> Deliso, M. (July 3, 2020). “‘Unsafe’: Women in public health facing pushback and threats for coronavirus response.” Retrieved October 14, 2021, from <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/unsafe-women-public-health-facing-pushback-threats-coronavirus/story?id=71520262>