

HB 1084
OPPOSE

Members of the HGO Committee,

Thank you for your time and consideration of this opposition to HB 1084.

I do have many specific concerns, some of which are detailed below, but I want to stress that I am extremely distressed at the expansive scope and impact of this legislation. Although all of the numerous provisions outlined may technically fall under “Covid Reponse,” the sheer breadth of covered subjects and statutory changes violates the spirit, if not the letter, of Maryland’s prohibition of omnibus bills. It is confusing for the public- who would be paying for all of this, and who these policies would directly impact!- to follow, and it requires much more time for conversation and thought than a typical piece of legislation.

Additionally, I would like to note for the record that Senator Rosapepe mentioned there would be forthcoming changes to SB 840/HB 1084 at the Senate hearing last week- however it is almost midnight the night before testimony is due and there have been no updates to the text on the website. With that being the case, I’m writing this based on possibly outdated bill language; if there have been changes it would be nice to have had the opportunity to actually review them prior to needing to upload this in the morning.

My main concerns are the fiscal impact of this bill, and two of the frankly unscientific and unethical policies it aims to pass:

1, The money required to finance the provisions in this legislation would be an unnecessary financial burden to the state, and may cut into funding for other critical health initiatives. Continuing on with outdated practices and spending money on ineffective policies will not give us better outcomes. It’s a complete disregard of evidence based public health and the lessons we’ve learned throughout this pandemic. From a public health standpoint, many provisions of this bill are now outdated and do not best serve Marylanders or their health. While I absolutely support funding and preparation for public health, continuing to throw dollars and energy to outdated testing, tracing, and vaccine incentive efforts ALL THE WAY UNTIL 2023 is counterproductive and not a judicious use of resources. To this point, I was appalled to see that the only two favorable testimonies in the Senate came not from MDH or from public health advisors, but from two companies (testing, and vaccine passport technology) who would stand to benefit financially from this legislation. That is quite a statement on its own.

2, Updating the MyIR Mobile platform to expand its usefulness as a “voluntary vaccine passport” is an outrageous proposition. According to the fiscal and policy note, this would cost MDH close to 3 million dollars, and it would take 12-18 months for the work contract to even be awarded. As we are even now seeing the rollback of vaccine passports- because they are not useful, they are burdensome for businesses, and extremely unpopular with the public- committing the state to such a large expense is not sound policy. Further, especially given the recent situation with Maryland’s health data and systems being compromised, this concept is a huge privacy and security risk.

3, The topic of pharmacists vaccinating children needs its own hearing, and in fact I’ve watched this very topic be debated more than once here. This is not a safe practice, it is not supported by pediatricians or parents, and it absolutely should not become a permanent policy in Maryland. It is unnecessary, unsafe, and deprives children of the comprehensive medical care that they deserve. It is nothing more than a financial boost to pharmacies. I have also submitted a few info pieces that I urge you to review in regards to this matter.

This bill is fiscally irresponsible, and the policies and provisions are not evidence based or supported by the public. It is more critical than ever right now that we SAVE our funding dollars and our PRECIOUS public health efforts for EFFECTIVE initiatives that will ACTUALLY help our state move forward. Unfortunately none of that can be found in this bill.

Respectfully,

Jenna Butler
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