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February 23, 2022

**COMMITTEE:** House Health and Government Operations

**BILL:** HB 609 – Local Health Officers – Removal – Grounds and Process

**POSITION:** Support

The Horizon Foundation is Howard County's community health foundation and the largest independent health philanthropy in the state of Maryland. We lead community change so everyone in Howard County can live a longer, better life.

As we continue to move through the COVID-19 pandemic, the leadership and guidance of our local health officers have never been more important. Our local health officers continue to lead with science, protecting the health and safety of our communities. Despite the historic disinvestment of our public health infrastructure over the past two decades and public threats to their safety and jobs, our local health officers continue to serve on the frontlines.

As a community health foundation and community partner, it is disheartening to see our local health officers dismissed or terminated without clear reasoning, evidence or a process to be heard. To that end, we urge a **favorable vote on HB 609**, which outlines clear reasons for removal and a clear process for local health officers to be heard.

According to the [Baltimore Sun](#), close to 500 health officers across the country left their posts due to persistent budget cuts, overwhelming demands fueled by the pandemic, intimidation and a myriad of other challenges. In addition to outlining a clear, transparent and equitable process for removal, we must ensure our public health infrastructure has the funding needed to combat future pandemics, recruit and keep talented staff and combat health inequities. Adequately funding our public health infrastructure and protecting health officers from political persecution as outlined in **HB 609** will better support, protect and keep qualified local health officers in their roles.

We can come out of this pandemic with stronger health departments ready to respond to long-standing health inequities in areas such as diabetes, heart disease, maternal and child health outcomes and mental health – just to name a few. The demands on our local health officers and the public health system are evident as we move through this crisis, work to vaccinate our population and protect our community against any future public health crises. We must support and protect our local health officers, who are the lifeblood of our public health infrastructure, in order to address the persistent health and safety needs in our community.

Therefore, we urge a **favorable vote on HB 609**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.