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SB0210

March 18, 2024

TO: Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 210 – Emergency Medical Services – Paramedics – Immunization Administration – Effective Date

POSITION: Support

Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 210.

SB 210 extends legal permission for paramedics to administer influenza, hepatitis B, and tuberculosis skin testing in a nonemergency setting. Importantly, it also extends the period for which paramedics may administer flu and COVID vaccines, most notably in the homebound setting.

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) partners with the Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) to provide COVID vaccines for homebound residents. In 2023, BCFD administered 193 COVID vaccinations in partnership with BCHD. Allowing paramedics to continue providing these services means that influenza and COVID immunization for homebound residents will remain a cornerstone of our campaign to protect our most vulnerable neighbors.

COVID and flu continue to infect people, with older adults and people with underlying conditions often most severely affected. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows the level of COVID circulating in Maryland as “very high.”ⁱ The Maryland Department of Health has issued warnings to providers across the state about rising hospitalizations due to COVID and flu and has even recommended universal masking in clinical settings. It only makes sense to allow paramedics to keep vaccinating those most susceptible to respiratory diseases. Importantly, the Maryland health care workforce continues to face shortages.ⁱⁱ Extending the provisions allowing paramedics to continue providing COVID and flu vaccines will benefit residents statewide.

BCFD and BCHD share a vision of a healthy Baltimore City and a mission to bring health care to our residents where they need it most: in the home. Without the assistance of BCFD and their paramedics, BCHD would not be able to provide homebound vaccinations, leaving our most vulnerable residents at risk. SB 210 will allow us to continue this crucial work.

For the above reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on SB 210.

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). National Wastewater Surveillance System - COVID-19 Current Wastewater Viral Activity Levels Map. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nwss/rv/COVID19-currentlevels.html>

ⁱⁱ Maryland Hospital Association. (2022). 2022 State of Maryland's Health Care Workforce Report. Retrieved from <https://www.mhaonline.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2022-state-of-maryland-s-health-care-workforce-report.pdf>