



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Meena Seshamani, M.D., Ph.D., Secretary

March 3, 2026

The Honorable Heather Bagnall
Chair, House Health Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: House Bill 1109 – Public Health Reform Act – Letter of Support with Amendments

Dear Chair Bagnall and Committee members:

The Maryland Department of Health (the Department) respectfully submits this letter of support with amendments for House Bill (HB) 1109 - Public Health Reform Act. HB 1109 would extend the Commission on Public Health through June, 2028 and make changes to Commission membership, as well as amend state processes related to local health department hiring, procurements, and other written agreements. HB 1109 also requires the development of a Public Health Workforce Development Fund.

The Department supports the goals of HB 1109 to improve public health infrastructure and ensure cohesion across the entirety of the Maryland governmental public health system. The Department also supports the extension of the Commission on Public Health to provide a dedicated structure to continue building and strengthening public health alignment. Outside of this bill, the Department has taken multiple steps to identify and address the challenges that local health departments are facing, including streamlining processes such as agreement approvals and building closures, creating structured support to facilitate feedback and sharing, and reviewing and addressing both recent and longstanding opportunities for improvement, including in the areas of local hiring, communications, and budgets. As the Department noted in our briefing to the Committee on February 3, 2026, our leadership team has worked to enhance support for and collaboration with local health departments in line with the goals of the Commission on Public Health recommendations, and we welcome the opportunity to continue to build upon this progress in partnership with the Committee and local health officers.

In line with this support, the Department respectfully requests amendments to the bill's current language to ensure provisions within the bill do not unnecessarily conflict with other state or federal policies or regulations. Those proposed amendments are attached to this letter below.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide this information and looks forward to continued collaboration with the General Assembly and stakeholders to advance local health services in Maryland. If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Meghan Lynch, Director of Governmental Affairs at meghan.lynch@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

Meena Seshamani, M.D., Ph.D.
Secretary of Health

AMENDMENT TO HOUSE BILL 1109
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 4, strike in their entirety lines 28 through 31, inclusive.

Rationale: While the Department's local health departments are non-budgeted, they remain State Regular positions with the same rights and impacts as any other state position. Consequently, they are subject to bargaining unit Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) provisions, including those regarding pay equity.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 5, in lines 26 through 28, inclusive, strike in their entirety and substitute "THE SECRETARY MAY DELEGATE CONTRACT AND WRITTEN AGREEMENT APPROVALS TO THE DEPUTY SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES, AND THE DEPUTY SECRETARY MAY DELEGATE APPROVAL AUTHORITY TO LOCAL HEALTH OFFICERS."

Rationale: A delegation provision would best support the streamlining and timeliness of contractual review, as well as allow delegation to local health officers. There are a variety of factors that impact contractual review time, including contract length, complexity of provisions, conflicts with state law or regulations, and others.

AMENDMENT NO. 3

On page 6, in line 18, after "STATE" insert "AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT"

Rationale: Decisions regarding health officer service on external boards are the purview of the Maryland State Ethics Commission. Each request for board or committee service is reviewed by the Commission, and guidance or recommendations are provided to the local health officer. The lack of compensation does not change the fiduciary duty that a board of directors member owes to an entity, and that fiduciary duty is what creates a duty and loyalty that cannot conflict with a State position under the Ethics law.

AMENDMENT NO. 4

On page 10, in line 12, strike "oversight over" and substitute "GUIDANCE FOR".

Rationale: Oversight of the Department and its activities is the purview and responsibility of the legislature.

AMENDMENT NO. 5

On page 12, strike in their entirety lines 30 through 33, inclusive.

Rationale: The Population Health Improvement Fund must support the goals outlined in the AHEAD Model State Agreement with the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services and cannot be linked to or provide funds to a Workforce Development Fund or similar.

AMENDMENT NO. 6

On page 13, strike in their entirety lines 17 through 18, inclusive.

Rationale: The Population Health Improvement Fund must support the goals outlined in the AHEAD Model State Agreement with the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services and cannot be linked to or provide funds to a Workforce Development Fund or similar.