



**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 172 (Senator Hayes)  
Maryland Health Equity Resource Act**

January 27, 2021

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in strong support of Senate Bill 172. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just, and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We urge you to support this legislation to reduce health disparities throughout the state, eliminating barriers in the health field, giving all Marylanders the same access to preventative care.

Maryland's healthcare system requires significant improvements to expand its inclusivity and promote equity for all Marylanders regardless of race, religion, socioeconomic status, age, and to address other systemic obstacles. According to the [Health Resources and Services Administration](#), **20 of Maryland's main jurisdictions are identified as "Medically Underserved Areas," which means they have "too few primary care providers, high infant mortality, high poverty or a high elderly population."** In addition to this database, the effects of COVID-19 makes it even more difficult to refute or neglect inequalities in health. Prince George's County, which has a majority-black population, has experienced over 65,000 cases, the most in the state, and has recorded over 1,100 deaths. Prince George's also has a higher uninsured population, faces a higher primary care provider to patient ratio and a higher unemployment rate, all of which are health determinants of insufficient care in this jurisdiction, especially amid the ongoing pandemic.

In the past, there have been advancements to address the issues of health disparities in Maryland. In 2012, Governor O'Malley signed Senate Bill 234, [the Maryland Health Improvement and Disparities Reduction Act of 2012](#), which implemented necessary legislative components to reduce health disparities among Marylanders until it expired in 2016. Still, there is more work to be done because the truth is, health inequality still exists within Maryland. The Maryland Health Equity Resource Act allows the state to impose a necessary luxury tax on alcoholic beverages, which finances the Health Equity Resource Community Reserve Fund. By this tax generated fund, the Department of Health would have the ability to perform necessary preventative measures and interventions for Marylanders to display more health equities in the future.

Senate Bill 172 is important legislation that is a step forward in making Maryland's healthcare system more just and equal by eliminating the burden of health disparities. Strong Future Maryland urges the committee to vote favorably on Senate Bill 172.

John B. King Jr.

Alice Wilkerson

Founder and Board Chair

Executive Director